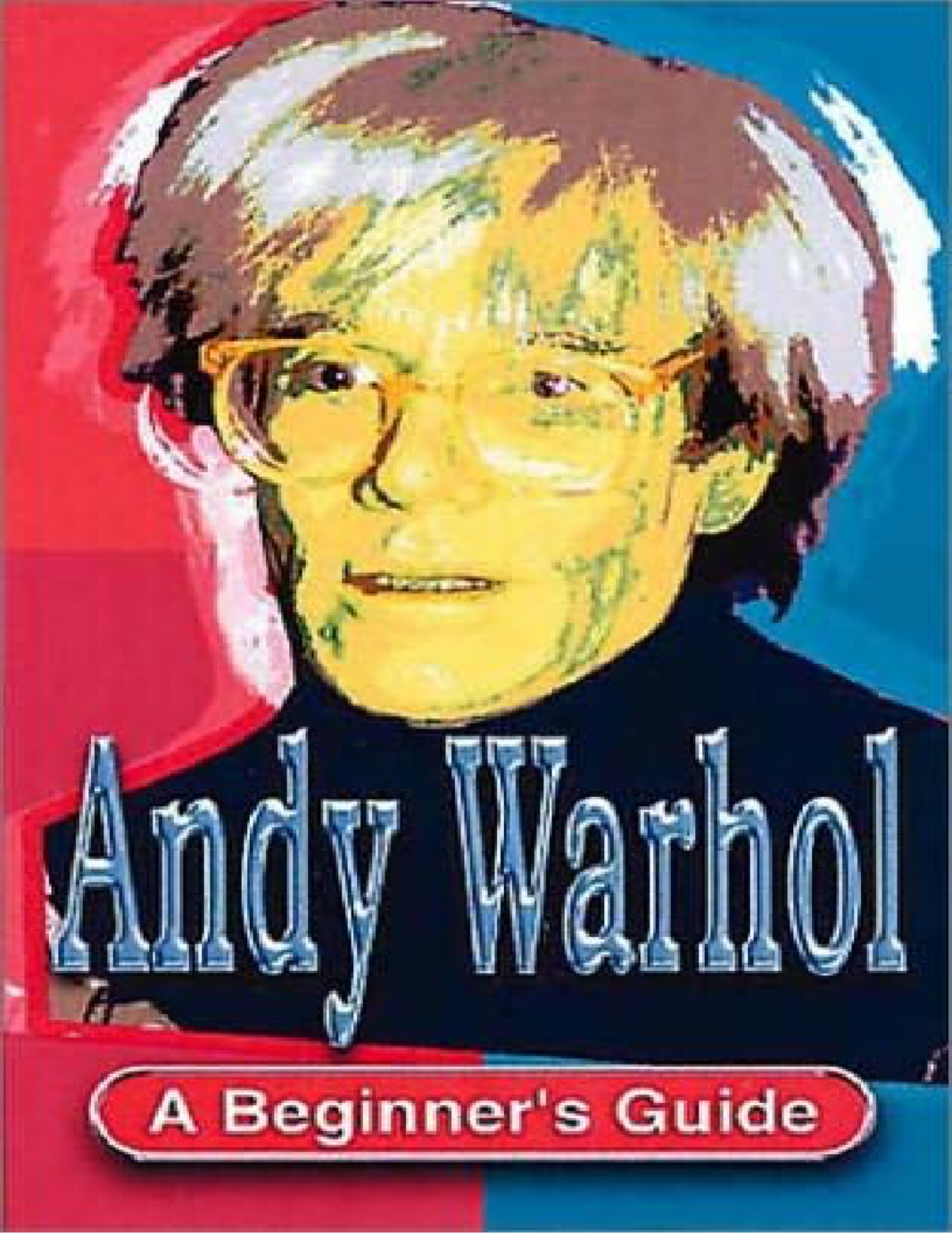
Andy Warhol
A Beginner's Guide

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Annotation

This handy series from Headway offers brief yet lucid introductions to the world's cultural icons. Each book examines the life, the work, and the legends surrounding its subject, and key terms and concepts are highlighted and clearly explained. Additionally, each chapter ends with a review section for easy reference and to help consolidate the reader's understanding of the text.

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Geoff Nicholson
Andy Warhol

1 Introduction

It would be hard to overestimate the importance that Andy Warhol and his work have for the contemporary visual arts. His work addresses and indeed embodies most of the major themes and dilemmas that confront modern artists.

These might be briefly described as: the role of popular culture and the mass media, the significance of the reproduced image, the nature of fame, celebrity and glamour, issues of sexuality, gender and representation, and not least, irony.

He is by any reckoning a 'Pop Artist'. His paintings of soup cans and Coke bottles, of Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe, of car crashes and electric chairs, provide some of the most distinctive and identifiable images in Pop Art*, and have done so since the early 1960s.

≡ A twentieth-century art movement that takes us images from consumerism, the mass media and popular culture, and simultaneously subverts and celebrates them.

Yet he now appears to be an artist of much wider and greater significance than the term 'Pop Art' suggests. He also belongs, at least in part, to a number of other artistic traditions: Minimalism[1], Dadaism[2], conceptual art[3], and above all portraiture, not least self-portraiture.

1: A movement that strips art down to its elemental forms, relieving it of subjective or personal expression. Artists include Donald Judd and Carl Andre.

2: A largely nihilistic artistic movement which believed in the subversion of traditional art and culture. Mists include Tristan Tzara and Marcel Duchamp.

3: Art that is more concerned with ideas than with representation. Its appeal is therefore intellectual rather than visual. Artists include Joseph Beuys. Christo. Yoko Ono.

Although he is best known for his works on paper and canvas, his work as a filmmaker, photographer, diarist, and occasionally as a sculptor (or at least maker of objects) and even as a product designer, share much of the same aesthetic.

Early in his career Warhol was perceived as a charlatan who had contempt for the art establishment and for the general public, and perhaps for art itself. Bringing paintings of soup cans or dollar bills into the temple of high art was seen as a deliberate desecration. Today it seems not so much that he hated high art, but that he was changing the nature of what art could be, and blurring forever any hard and fast distinction between high art and low.

Certainly he was a prankster and a provocateur. There undoubtedly is something outrageous in filling an art gallery with 32 more or less identical paintings of Campbell's soup cans. It was new and it was attention-grabbing. The soup cans demonstrate that even though Warhol's art often has a blankness and a banality to it, it is never quiet or introverted.

Warhol's other provocations included sending a Warhol impersonator out on a lecture tour, having his assistants make his paintings for him, having his mother sign his work, publishing a 'novel' that he claimed never to have read, since it was made up of transcriptions of other people's telephone calls, and publishing a book of photographs called *America* that contained pictures taken in France.

You could argue that these subversive activities sometimes got in the way of the art, but it might be truer to say they were intrinsic to it. If these things demonstrate an amused scepticism about art, it is surely one that any sensible observer of the modern art scene is likely to share. In that sense we get the feeling that Warhol is on our side.

Robert Hughes in *American Visions* says that Warhol's art;

"…all flowed from one central insight: that in a culture glutted with information, where most people experience most things at second or third hand through TV and print, through images that become banal and disassociated by being repeated again and again and again, there is a role for affectless art. You no longer need to be hot and full of feeling. You can be supercool, like a slightly frosted mirror."

This tells only half the story. Certainly you would be hard pressed to claim that all of Warhol's art is 'hot and full of feeling', yet it is seldom quite as blank or affectless as both its fans and critics claim. Series such as the electric chairs, the car crashes, the atom bomb explosions, the skulls, the Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe portraits, extract very powerful feelings from apparently disassociated and exhausted images. In that sense his art is about renewing and revitalizing feelings, not about escaping from them.

Warhol is perhaps unusual in not having created any single masterpieces; there is no *Mona Lisa*, no *Guernica* in his canon. All his great works come in multiples; many soup cans, many Coke bottles, many Marilyns, many Maos. There was no doubt a commercial principle at work here. There was a large demand for Warhol's work and he was eager to satisfy it. On the other hand, the art world is such that scarcity can also create value; the prices of Francis Bacon's paintings, for instance, rose so high because he destroyed so many of them.

But financial art market considerations aside, it seems completely appropriate that Warhol's art is so plentiful, so abundant. He is concerned with the world of mass media and mass production, with

repeated images and standardized everyday products, with glut and overload. It would be absurd if he had created only a few tortured, costive works of art.

We should treat with suspicion the much repeated line that 'Andy Warhol was his own greatest creation', yet there is no doubt that he lived and looked the part of the Pop Artist — the cool, detached, opinionless observer — and this was a role he worked hard to establish and maintain. In this role he finds life with its attendant relationships, sex and love, endlessly difficult. He says he'd prefer not to care. He says he wants to be a machine. He tells interviewers they should just make up what they want him to say and he'll say it. Whether he actually 'meant' any of this is beside the point.

The Warhol persona inhabits a strange territory between the naive and the *faux naif**, between the instinctive and the artificial.

≡ Someone or something that has the appearance of naivety but in reality is very knowing and sophisticated.

It is a pose but it is not completely fake. When it was suggested to Paul Morrissey, the chief collaborator on the later Warhol films, that Warhol was an *idiot savant**, he replied, "Well, I don't know about the savant part."

≡ Term used to describe individuals who display little obvious intelligence but are able to perform formidable mental or artistic tasks.

There is no doubt some personal spite in this comment, but Truman Capote seemed to be of much the same opinion when he described Warhol as a sphinx without a riddle.

In a 1968 exhibition catalogue, Warhol was quoted as saying;

"If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."

One is, of course, free to decide to what extent this is a pose, and how far it is said for effect, ironic or otherwise.

You might also wonder whether this is a genuine attempt to demystify his art or just another form of mystification. After all, nothing reinforces a mystery quite as much as saying that there's no mystery at all. Either way, Warhol is reacting to a long tradition which claims that serious avant-garde art could not be understood without the benefit of an elaborate intellectual theory, what Tom Wolfe calls the 'painted word'. Of course it is in the nature of theory that it can be applied where it is not required, but Warhol is surely the least theoretical of artists. When he says that what you see is what you get, you can hear a whole army of lay art enthusiasts breathing a collective sigh of relief.

On today's contemporary scene it is probably easier to name the

artists Warhol hasn't influenced than those he has. In his own lifetime he was an inspiration and role model for a generation of artists that included Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring and Julian Schnabel. Today the work of Jeff Koons and Matthew Barney in America, Damian Hirst, Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin in England would be unthinkable if Warhol hadn't existed.

In fact Warhol's influence is so widespread, so all pervasive, that it has almost become invisible. It is part of the culture, part of what we take for granted. His art has changed the way we think and feel about banal objects, about the media, about fame and about art itself. If you would see his monument, look around you, or failing that just turn on the TV.

Summary

Although originally hailed as a Pop Artist, we now see Andy Warhol's significance in other artistic traditions, especially portraiture.

His is a genuine subversive and the least 'theoretical' of artists.

2 A Brief Life of Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol sometimes used to say that he came from 'nowhere'. In fact he was born in Pittsburgh in August 1928, but his parents came from the village of Mikova in an area called Carpathian Ruthenia, a place where Russia, Poland, Hungary and what is now Slovakia come together, a place found on only the most scrupulously detailed maps.

Warhol was the youngest of three sons (a daughter died at the age of six weeks). His parents, Ondrej and Julia Warhola, had emigrated to the United States in 1922, and were devout Byzantine Catholics. Ondrej was a manual labourer, and like many other Americans he lost his job in the Depression.

Andy Warhola, as he was then known (he did not change his name to Warhol until 1949), was a frail, mother's boy. He suffered from rheumatic fever and was frequently kept home from school. While he convalesced he read movie magazines, comic books, and made drawings and collages. When he was well he was a great movie-goer, and he wrote to movie stars asking for their photographs and autographs. He was a particular fan of Shirley Temple, and the Warhol archive includes a signed photograph she sent him in response to one of his letters.

All this time he drew constantly, perhaps obsessively, and while still a schoolboy he attended art classes at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum. On leaving school in 1945 he was accepted by the art department of the Carnegie Institute of Technology. Once there, however, he had trouble with his studies, especially the parts that involved writing, and he was dropped at the end of his freshman year. After a spell selling fruit door to door with his brother he was reinstated and this time he did much better.

He won an art prize, he joined the student film club and attended lectures by the likes of the avant-garde composer John Cage and the experimental film-maker Maya Deren. In 1948, while still a student, he took a job at a Pittsburgh department store, painting backdrops for window displays. The store's display department was populated by flamboyant homosexuals, Warhol's first encounter with that world.

♦

Warhol goes to New York

Although Andy Warhol was to become the quintessential New York artist, he did not make his first visit to that city until 1948. He took his portfolio with him, went knocking on doors, and eventually found a sympathetic audience in Tina Fredericks at *Glamour* magazine, who gave him some freelance work.

After graduation in 1949 he moved to New York permanently,

living initially in a slum apartment on the Lower East Side. He went back to Tina Fredericks who this time commissioned him to draw shoes for her magazine. Shoes were a perfect subject for Warhol. These drawings got him widely noticed and as a result he began to do a lot of work for other magazines and ad agencies.

He was very successful indeed as a commercial artist. His work included book jackets and newspaper advertisements, including one drawing of a sailor injecting himself with heroin, which first appeared as an ad for a radio programme called *The Nation's Nightmare* and then went on to be used as an album cover. It eventually won him a gold medal from the Art Director's Club.

Warhol worked hard and was soon earning enough money to justify hiring an assistant, a practice that would be important throughout his working life. Soon his mother sold her house in Pittsburgh and moved to New York to live with her son, initially sharing a bedroom with him in his apartment. They would live together, not always harmoniously, until her death in 1972.

Socially Warhol now moved in New York's gay elite, a very discrete, not to say clandestine, scene. He went to expensive restaurants in the hope of spotting celebrities, with some success. It was also at this time that he started to go bald and began wearing a wig.

In his later career, Warhol consciously made little distinction between art and commerce, but when he was given his first one-man gallery shows in the early 1950s he left out his commercial work and exhibited drawings based on the work of Truman Capote, then a series of paper sculptures decorated with drawn figures, then drawings of a dancer called John Butler.

In 1955 he had an exhibition of overtly homosexual drawings at the Bodley Gallery, and although reviews and sales were poor, some of the less explicit drawings were selected for a show at New York's Museum of Modern Art the following year.

Warhol's work in this period was delicate and fey, and it made little impression on the serious world of fine art, which was then much taken with the aggressive energies of *Abstract Expressionism**.

≡ Post-war, mostly New York-based artistic movement, that produced large, non-figurative, gestural, spiritualty complex paintings. Artists include Jackson Pollock, Mark Kothko, Willem de Kooning.

It was not a style that appealed to Warhol at all, but with the start of the 1960s many things in the art world and the world at large were about to change.

♦

Warhol enters the 1960s

At the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1960, Jasper Johns had a ground-

breaking exhibition called *Flags, Targets and Numbers*. The show sold out and the Museum of Modern Art bought four major paintings. Johns had previously been a commercial artist, as had Robert Rauschenberg, who also had a successful exhibition at the Castelli. Both also happened to be homosexual. Warhol was jealous of their success but he could see possibilities for himself.

He began a series of black and white paintings of nose jobs, wigs, television sets, charts of dance steps, all based on cheap ads found in magazines. Then he painted cartoon characters — Dick Tracy, Batman and Popeye — then a Coke bottle. Although he was working in the area that would eventually bring him success, these early works failed to provide him with a breakthrough.

By the end of 1960 most of those who would come to be considered major Pop Artists — Claes Oldenberg, Red Grooms, Tom Wesselman, George Segal, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist — had all had successful exhibitions in New York. Andy Warhol at this time didn't even have a gallery.

Then, according to legend, a fledgling gallery owner called Muriel Latow met Warhol, and he asked her to give him some ideas for the things he should paint. Her first suggestion was that he should paint money. The second was that he should paint a can of soup.

Warhol's mother went out and bought one can of each of the 32 varieties of Campbell's soup and he began work, making individual 'portraits' of each can, seen against a plain white background. Warhol had found his subject. The paintings were first shown in Los Angeles in 1962 at the Ferus Gallery, were a huge success, and their fame spread internationally.

Given the recent history of art it may seem odd to think that paintings of soup cans could be considered outrageous or shocking, and no doubt the controversy was stoked by the media, yet some of the outrage was undoubtedly real, caused by the feeling that Warhol was somehow insulting and conning his public. What helped to fuel the debate was the fact that in an important sense you didn't need actually to see these works of art in order to get their point, in order to have an opinion about them and be able to join in the debate. The very idea of a so-called serious artist painting soup cans was outrage enough. In that sense Warhol was always something of a conceptual artist.

He began to make paintings of iconic yet banal, all-American subjects — Green Stamps*, 'Glass — handle with care' labels, postage stamps, dollar bills — and he continued working with soup cans and Coke bottles, creating multiple rather than single images.

≡ Stamps that were given out with purchases in shops and supermarkets in the 1960s as a kind of bonus system. Stamps were

stuck into books and redeemed against consumer items.

♦

Warhol discovers mass production

In 1962 Warhol began to use silk-screening in his work, a process that enabled him to make repeated yet often slightly differing images. In May 1963 he told *Time* magazine;

"Paintings are too hard. The things I want to show are mechancial. Machines have less problems. I'd like to be a machine. Wouldn't you?"

Right from the beginning, Warhol was always very quotable.

The silk-screen process enabled him to make art in great quantities, and he often left some of the manual work to assistants. He went to his collection of movie magazines, and used extant images as the basis for portraits of Elvis Presley, Troy Donahue, Liz Taylor, Warren Beatty, Natalie Wood, and of course Marilyn Monroe.

Later he began dealing with profoundly American forms of violence and death: images of car crashes, the electric chair, the atom bomb, race riots. At that point in the 1960s there was no shortage of loaded material. His images of Jackie Kennedy mourning her husband's death have become part of the iconography of the event itself.

The 1960s also offered new, more extreme forms of celebrity. In a world of Beatlemania, there was room for the right sort of artist to become a pop star too, and Warhol looked and acted the part in a way that the likes of Johns or Rauschenberg simply didn't. Besides, their art was complex, awkward and ambiguous in ways that Warhol's apparently wasn't, although this is in no way to deny the depth of Warhol's work. Warhol very soon became far and away the most famous of the Pop Artists.

♦

Warhol goes to the movies

Given Warhol's prolific output at this time it may seem surprising that he still found time to be an avid movie-goer, but somehow he did. His tastes were very broad; both mainstream and avant-garde. He began to attend screenings at the New York Film-Makers' Co-op, where the stars of the emerging American 'underground film' showed their work.

These relentlessly subversive, rough-edged, often sexually very explicit movies appealed greatly to Warhol. He thought he could do something similar, if not better. He bought a Bolex movie camera and told people, "I'm going to make bad films."

Warhol's movies are much more talked about than they are seen, and sometimes they are much easier to talk about than they are to watch. In movies such as *Kiss, Eat, Sleep, Blow Job* and *Empire*, the

conceptual element was once again highly important. You didn't actually have to see a five-and-a-half-hour film of a man sleeping, or an eight-hour film of the Empire State Building to get a firm, if sometimes mistaken, idea of what they were like and what they were about.

The best of them were not narrowly conceptual, however. Movies like *Chelsea Girls* or *Beauty #2* or even the simple screentests, show Warhol's fascination with people, especially if they were beautiful young men or women, or if they were bikers or drag queens, or in some other way extraordinary. This was surely why Warhol was able to perform the extraordinary feat of introducing avant-garde film to a mass audience. The public shared his fascination.

Making movies was expensive, so Warhol continued to make silk-screens, largely to finance his movies. Both silk-screening and movie-making were labour intensive, requiring the employment of numerous assistants. They also required large premises and so Warhol moved to a warehouse, a place that came to be known as *the Factory*.

It was a single room, 100 feet by 40, and its interior was eventually painted entirely silver by Billy Name, a photographer and to a large extent the caretaker of the Factory.

Warhol's fame drew a vast crew of oddballs, some far more picturesque than others, a mix of high life and low life, street junkies, heiresses, transvestites, rent boys and poets. It was an archetypal 1960s environment. There was a good deal of sex and drugs and rock and roll, and the Factory even had its own rock band, the Velvet Underground, and this eventually led to Warhol becoming briefly involved in multimedia events such as the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable**.

≡ A multi media event and environment involving rock bands, dance, and the projection of slides and film.

♦

Warhol and Valerie Solanas

The Factory was hardly a nurturing environment. In some ways it resembled a court with its members trying to find favour with Warhol. For his part he took pleasure in seeing people antagonize each other, and these tensions and confrontations often became the raw material for his movies. One of his less stable actresses, Valerie Solanas, was soon to change things completely.

Solanas was a self-styled feminist. She had founded and was the only member of an organization called SCUM, the Society for Cutting Up Men, though her political activities hadn't extended much further than writing a manifesto.

It would be absurd to make any claims or excuses for Solanas, but some of the things she put in her manifesto are not so mad that she wouldn't have found plenty of radical feminists who, in 1968, shared

her views. Even today one would not have to go far to find agreement for her complaint that;

"We all know that 'Great Art' is great because male authorities have told us, and we can't claim otherwise, as only those with exquisite sensitivities far superior to ours can perceive and appreciate greatness," (p.28 *SCUM Manifesto*).

Solanas appeared in a Warhol movie called *I, a Man* and afterwards she gave him a script she had written, entitled *Up Your Ass*, which she wanted him to make into a film. Warhol apparently loved the title, but when he failed to take on the project Solanas, not unnaturally, requested the return of the script, and when he told her he had lost it she asked for money. Warhol was always notoriously bad at giving money to his collaborators, and Solanas was no exception.

On the morning of Monday 3 June 1968, Solanas went to the Factory (which by now had changed location) looking for Warhol. On being told that he wasn't there she waited outside until his arrival in the late afternoon. She followed him into the lift and then into the Factory itself where she produced a gun and fired twice at Warhol without hitting him. With her third shot, however, she struck him in the right flank, the bullet exiting through the left side of his back.

The bullet damaged both Warhol's lungs, his liver, spleen, gall bladder and intestines. At the hospital he was clinically dead for an hour and a half, but he survived after a five-and-a-half-hour operation that included the removal of his spleen.

The shooting was a major news story, although there were those who thought it was some kind of Pop Art publicity stunt. The story would no doubt have run longer in the media had it not been rapidly replaced by another shooting, the assassination of Robert Kennedy.

Valerie Solanas claimed she had shot Warhol in the name of feminism although, as has often been pointed out, Warhol makes rather a poor symbol of macho male patriarchy. Solanas also claimed she did it because Warhol was controlling her life. This was not literally true, and yet there were those who thought that Warhol had reaped what he had sown. If, for your own amusement, you surrounded yourself with strange, potentially dangerous, unstable people, there was an inevitablity, perhaps even a certain justice, in one of them turning against you.

Ultimately Solanas received only a three-year jail sentence. It might well have been longer, but Warhol refused to be a witness in her prosecution.

♦

Warhol recuperates

Warhol's recovery was long and slow, and he remained in

intermittent pain for the rest of his life, yet by August 1968 he was at home painting again. Crucially, the price of Warhol's work rose dramatically after the shooting. In 1970 a soup can painting sold at auction for $60,000, which at the time was a record for a work by a living American artist. That same year a travelling exhibition of Warhol's work started a long, international tour that included London, Paris, Los Angeles, Chicago and eventually New York. This greatly enhanced his reputation in America and abroad.

After the shooting Warhol changed his social allegiance to what the art historian John Richardson describes as *High Bohemia**.

≡ Term used to describe Warhol's working and social environment, which included movie stars, fashion designers, various heiresses and members of the European aristocracy.

He wanted a safer environment, and his working and social life would now centre around movie stars, fashion designers, as well as various heiresses and members of the European aristocracy. He even had dealings with the likes of Imelda Marcos and the Shah of Iran.

In 1969 he founded *inter/VIEW* magazine (which later changed its spelling to *Interview*) and used his celebrity contacts to fill its pages with images of and interviews with his new acquaintances. Often photographs from the magazine would form the basis of portraits. Warhol was rich by now, but the Factory was still an extremely expensive operation to run. In order to make money, Warhol set himself up as a society portraitist, and got his assistants to work very hard to get portrait commissions. At this time just about anyone with $25,000 could have their portrait done by Warhol. So as well as creating portraits of stars and celebrities, he also made portraits of many wealthy, anonymous industrialists and their wives.

Warhol's High Bohemia reached critical mass with the brief advent of Studio 54, the notorious New York nightclub, of which Warhol was a regular habitue. As with the original Factory it was a place steeped in sex and drugs, though this time the music of choice was disco rather than rock and roll. Again it was a place where high and low life met, but Warhol's involvement was now far more peripheral. He was a visitor, not an inhabitant. His 1979 book of photographs, *Exposures*, records this world with wide but far from innocent eyes.

♦

Warhol in decline

Warhol had always been an avid collector but his increasing wealth now meant he could acquire seriously on a large, not to say obsessive, scale. He and his mother moved into a townhouse on New York's East 66th Street and he turned it into a sort of private museum, one in which most of the rooms were kept locked and where nobody,

not even Warhol, ever viewed the collection.

He continued to work hard. He did a series of portraits of athletes, collaborated successfully with the artist Jamie Wyeth. He created two series of images, one called *Skulb*, one called *Shadows*, that today look like some of his most important work. He also made paintings using sexual imagery, one called *Torsos*, one called *Sex Parts*, the latter being extremely explicit.

At this point in the late 1970s, Warhol's high profile and his unashamed commercialism began to breed a certain contempt. There was a growing tendency to think of Warhol as at best irrelevant, at worst absurd. The 1970s ended for him with an exhibition of 56 pairs of portraits, of the likes of Bianca Jagger, Sylvester Stallone, Yves St. Laurent and Liza Minelli. Critics complained that these works of art were as shallow as the people they depicted, that Warhol had fallen under the spell of glamorous banality.

Those who felt he was a spent force had their prejudices further reinforced by a series of works he made in 1980 called *Reversals*, which revisited some of his most famous images, but now he silk-screened them 'in negative'. This may have looked like a backwards step at the time, but today these works look impressively powerful.

His credibility was hardly helped when he also worked for Mercedes Benz, producing Warholesque screenprints of their cars. And it plunged even further when he worked as a model for hire, appearing in ads for companies such as Sony, TDK, Coca-Cola and Golden Oak furniture.

In the early 1980s he was commissioned to create *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*, which included Einstein, Kafka and Golda Meir. Then he collaborated with the younger artists Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente and Keith Haring, in a more or less successful attempt to prove that he was still relevant and in touch with the contemporary scene.

Also in the early 1980s he produced a cable show called *Andy Warhol*'s TV although it was never a very successful or profitable venture. Later he did another show called *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes* for MTV which didn't do much better. He would always say that the failure of these television shows was a cause of great disappointment to him.

In 1986 he began a series of works based around Leonardo's *Last Supper*, over 100 in two years, and in January 1987 he had his first exhibition as a photographer. We now know that at this time he was regularly attending Mass and becoming increasingly serious about the Catholic faith that he had never entirely abandoned. He even served meals to the homeless at New York's Church of the Heavenly Rest.

However, as far as the world at large was concerned, at that point

in the late 1980s Andy Warhol was a working artist, with successes and failures, with supporters and enemies, with a reputation that was constantly being reassessed, rising and falling with the vagaries of public and critical taste. In any case, he apparently had a long working life still ahead of him.

♦

The death of Warhol

In February 1987 Andy Warhol was diagnosed as having an infected gall bladder and was advised to have it removed. With some reluctance he agreed. He was admitted to hospital and the routine operation seemed to go smoothly enough, but Warhol died the night after the operation.

There is some suggestion that the private nurse employed to attend him left her post at some time in the night. Certainly when she checked on him at 5.45 a.m. he had turned blue. A resuscitation team failed to revive him and he was pronounced dead at 6.31 a.m. on the morning of 22 February 1987.

In the aftermath of his death there would be endless legal wranglings concerning his treatment by the hospital, the value of his estate, and the fate of his paintings. His cultural importance was quickly confirmed, however, when the New York Museum of Modern Art held a major retrospective in 1989, and in 1994 the Andy Warhol Museum was opened in his native Pittsburgh, an enduring monument to the man and his art. His reputation has only increased with the years.

Looking back on Warhol's work it is easy to see that he was always much possessed by death; in the early works involving suicides and car crashes, in the later ones with skulls and shadows. His own self-portraits often look like death masks. However, two years before his death, in his book *America*, he had said, "Dying is the most embarrassing thing that can ever happen to you." Who would ever have guessed that Andy Warhol could be so easily embarrassed?

Summary

Warhol's family background was East European Catholic.

He was a successful commercial artist before he was a fine artist.

He was the most famous and I successful of the Pop Artists and played the part to the hilt.

In 1968 he was shot by Valerie Solanas, but survived after being clinically dead for an hour and a half.

His social allegiances gradually changed from New York pop low life to High Bohemia.

He died unexpectedly and comparatively young after an operation to remove his gall bladder.

3 Warhol the Pop Artist

One of the best working definitions of Pop Art I have come across appears at an online source called Biddington's Pedigree and Provenance (biddingtons.com). It says;

"Pop Art is a 20th century art movement that utilized the imagery and techniques of consumerism and popular culture. Pop Art developed in the late 1950s as a reaction against Abstract Expressionism and flourished in the sixties and early seventies. Pop Art favored figural imagery and the reproduction of everyday objects, such as Campbell soup cans, comic strips and advertisements. The movement eliminated distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' taste and between fine art and commercial art techniques."

This is a perfect description of Andy Warhol's work.

Lawrence Alloway, an English art critic, appears to have invented the term Pop Art some time in the middle to late 1950s; he himself has said that he doesn't quite remember when. He originally used it to refer to actual mass-produced products rather than to works of art concerned with these products, but it was a sufficiently useful and appealing label that it soon gained acceptance.

Alloway was connected with the Independent Group, a loose association of artists, architects and writers, based around London's ICA*.

≡ The Institute of Contemporary Arts, a London gallery that has championed cutting edge, avant-garde art, since the middle of the twentieth century.

Rejecting the idea of a British aesthetic, they embraced American popular culture, technology, Hollywood movies and science fiction imagery.

The artists involved included Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, the latter being responsible for a 1956 collage called *Just What Is It that Makes Today's homes so Different, so Appealing* which is usually regarded as the first work of Pop Art. It features a body builder, a stripper with a lampshade on her head, the cover of *Young Romance* magazine, a television, a tape recorder and a can of processed ham. Most of the elements of Pop Art and pop imagery were thus represented.

However, despite these English origins, Pop Art feels like an essentially American rather than English form. American Pop Artists were mostly unaware of their British counterparts. In fact, individual artists in America seem to have had little contact with each other until after their first major exhibitions. But something was obviously in the air on both sides of the Atlantic.

It had much to do with World War II. For the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, America had looked to Europe for its art. Europe was supposedly the upholder of tradition, culture and civilization, as well as the breeding ground for new forms of art. Impressionism[1], Cubism[2], Surrealism[3], and a host of other movements had all emerged from Europe.

1: The late nineteenth-century movement that marks the beginning of modern art, employing exuberant colour and vigorous brush strokes, often giving a sketchy 'unfinished' appearance. Generally concentrated on contemporary and vernacular subject matter. Artists include Monet, Manet, Cezanne, Degas.

2: A short-lived artistic movement that reduced physical forms to cubes, spheres and cylinders. It also contended that objects were best depicted by simultaneously showing them from multiple viewpoints. Artists include Picasso and Braque.

3: A post-Freudian artistic and literary movement involving the unrestrained exploration and expression of the unconscious and subconscious mind. Artists include Dali, Ernst, Magritte.

America was supposed to be the uncouth philistine cousin. By 1945 Europe had torn itself apart in two world wars, many of its major cities were in ruins, and the Allies had been victorious only after the intervention of the United States. Observers in both Europe and America saw that America might not be quite so uncouth and uncultured after all.

Abstract Expressionism was the first great post-war artistic movement. The name says it all. Based in and around New York, artists such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning created vast non-figurative canvases that used gestural painting to convey broad, passionate, if unspecified, feelings. It was possible to see this as an expression of post-war angst, although Pollock's angst seems to have been inspired by his personal demons rather than by external events, and one might well have said that the artists still living in Europe had rather more to be angst-ridden about than did those in America.

Abstract Expressionism was lofty, serious, existential. It was spiritual but in a highly intellectual way. It wasn't fun and it wasn't meant to be. It certainly had nothing much to do with American life as most people lived it. It is very easy to see Pop Art as a reaction against this rather grim high seriousness.

Giant, inchoate works by Rothko or Pollock may have caused a certain public outrage for being 'the kind of thing a child could do', but they were entirely defensible intellectually. But what intellectual argument might be brought to defend works of art that were so fiercely unintellectual as those of Pop? Could you defend a painting

like Roy Lichtenstein's *Sponge* (1962), which was merely a reworking of a cartoon panel showing a hand holding a sponge? Or a Claes Oldbenberg sculpture like *Soft Typewriter* (1963), a typewriter big enough for a giant to use, made from vinyl and kapok? Or how about Tom Wesselman's *Landscape № 5* (1964), which featured an almost life-size Volkswagen Beetle made of out of billboard materials?

The answer was that you could defend these works intellectually as comments on the environment or some such, but you really didn't need to. Pop Art, like pop music, was a thing you either 'got' or you didn't. If you had to have it explained, you would never truly understand it.

You can certainly make the argument that Pop Art is profoundly democratic. It takes ordinary, everyday life as its inspiration. It celebrates consumerism and the mass media. It deals with many of the things that high art had previously ignored, had indeed been opposed to, things like advertising, cars, aeroplanes, junk food, shiny surfaces, movie stars. It had glamour, colour and a sense of humour.

Again, as with pop music, its playfulness was part of its appeal. It was obviously in some ways serious and significant, while still being attractive and engaging at a visceral, immediate level. Pop was brash. It was unsubtle. It used the tricks of advertising and commerce. It also appeared, at the time, to be completely disposable, although history has shown that the best of it is surprisingly durable.

There is however, at least, one sense in which Warhol's work seems not to be quite pure 'Pop' at all, and that is in the manner of its detachment. Pop music, especially, is a hot medium. It is born out of passion and demands a passionate response from its audience. Much the same could be said for most popular movies and television. But Warhol's art is cool and detached. The best popular culture, especially 1960ˢ pop music, is deeply unironic. It says what it means in a way that Warhol never quite does.

Pop Art was certainly instrumental in the process of blurring, perhaps even ending, the distinction between high and low art, and in this way Pop Art sometimes plays a double game. Many of Roy Lichtenstein's paintings, for example, are in some sense about important subjects: love, marriage, parental conflict, war. Take, a painting like *Whaam* (1963), which shows one jet fighter shooting down another. Now, the horrors of war are a perfectly valid subject for great art — it was good enough for Goya, after all — but this subject matter is apparently neutralized or trivialized because Lichtenstein takes his image from a cartoon, albeit an especially striking and well-drawn cartoon. He then raises the stakes again, and transforms this trivial cartoon into high art by making it into a huge painting on canvas, over 30 feet by 14.

The opposition between high and low, between great themes and the banal depiction of them, remains in a sort of balance or oscillation, and this playful ambiguity is at the very heart of Pop Art. It always challenges the viewer to decided how fax it is serious and how far it sees seriousness as absurd.

The way the American Pop Artists viewed their own culture was necessarily different from the way it appeared to outsiders. For English Pop Artists, for Peter Blake and David Hockney, say, American culture was alien and exotic. American cars, food and household products were literally unobtainable in austere post-war Britain. In America this was clearly not the case. A Cadillac was obviously not available to everyone, but at least it was familiar, it was an object that you could see as part of your own world.

Warhol's impoverished, immigrant background placed him in a special, though not uncommon, relation to that culture. Yes, the American dream asserted that wealth and success were potentially available to everyone, but how exactly might a poor, not especially well-educated young man in post-war Pittsburgh participate in that dream? Consumption was one obvious solution. And if one couldn't afford to buy an all-American Cadillac, you could certainly afford to drink all-American Coca-Cola, or to eat all-American Campbell's soup.

One of the joys of American democracy, as asserted by Warhol himself, is that the Coke bought by the rich man is every bit as good as the one bought by the poor man. In the matter of soft drinks, at least, money cannot buy you an advantage.

There is always the question of whether an artist chooses his subject matter or whether the subject matter chooses him. It has been said that the young, aspiring Andy Warhol constantly asked everyone he met for ideas that he could use in his art, and yet clearly he did not accept any and every suggestion. Selection was everything. In selecting soup cans, Coke bottles, Green Stamps or dollar bills, he was making aesthetic decisions and favouring ubiquitous American images, and although these images can be read as having great symbolic weight, Warhol uses them lightly, perhaps even frivolously. Certainly he makes Jasper Johns' reworkings of the American flag, for instance, look decidedly ponderous.

Sometimes Warhol's choice of subject matter may be deliberately banal but it is seldom innocent. In the cases of the Coke bottle and the Campbell's soup can, for instance, both are highly successful pieces of industrial design. Indeed Warhol had to come to a financial arrangement with both companies to avoid copyright problems. The Brillo box, which he turned into a sort of replica sculpture, was, by a strange irony, actually designed by a painter called James Harvey, an unsuccessful Abstract Expressionist.

Warhol's subject matter then, like that of most of the other Pop Artists, is so to speak quoted. It is put in inverted commas. It is, if you like, 'found'. And although you might argue that a can of soup is no less (or more) suitable as a subject for art than, say, sunflowers or waterlilies, the fact remains that Warhol is not selecting subjects in the way that Monet or Van Gogh were. He is creating a work of art out of a product that has already been created by someone else.

In this he is pursuing a line of artistic practice that probably starts with Marcel Duchamp. In 1917 Duchamp signed a urinal with the name R. Mutt, called it *Fountain* and originated the concept of the 'ready-made'. Whereas a collage appropriates an object from the world and incorporates it in a work of art, Duchamp asserts that a thing is art simply because an artist says so. Indeed, after Duchamp it might appear that the artist's chief function is to point at just about anything and call it art. Warhol was not averse to doing that.

However, Warhol did not simply sign existing soup cans. Initially at least, he actually painted them. It is worth noting that some of Warhol's soup can paintings are a lot less deadpan than is often supposed. They are stylized. They are appropriated but they are transformed too, sometimes made cartoon-like, sometimes shown with a peeling label, sometimes crushed or with a can opener stuck in the top, sometimes given false or arbitrary colours. When seen up close, they have a handmade look to them.

In any case, not all Warhol's subject matter is banal at all. After his early success creating art with more or less 'neutral' subjects, he selected subject matter that was heavily loaded. His *Death and Disaster* series uses images of race riots, car crashes, the atom bomb, the electric chair, the John F. Kennedy assassination. These things are anything but banal, and Warhol's attitude may be detached but it is hardly indifferent.

How could an artist be indifferent to the Kennedy assassination? You might argue that multiple representations of it lead to indifference, but that is Warhol's point too. Equally, you might well wonder how an artist could turn the Kennedy assassination into art without seeming sanctimonious or sentimental. The answer is that Warhol addresses the subject obliquely and brilliantly, by concentrating on Jackie Kennedy, the presidential widow. In a variety of works, with titles like *Jackies, Nine Jackies, Sixteen Jackies*, Warhol shows multiple media images of her, some grief-stricken at the funeral, some of her smiling long before the assassination. The images coexist and clash against each other. They show life in the midst death, death in the midst of life, and are surely some of Warhol's most humane works.

It is hard to tell whether Warhol's taste for what might be called

'tabloid' subject matter was natural and instinctive, or whether he deliberately chose lurid subjects in the knowledge that they would endear him to a mass audience while simultaneously annoying the pious world of high art. Sometimes he literally reproduced the front pages of tabloid newspapers, in works such as *A Boy For Meg* (1961) or *129 Die in Jet (Plane Crash*) (1962).

But whether instinctive or calculated, his fascination with fame, money, glamour, violence, death, consumer products and sexuality made him not only a man who was in touch with his own times, but also an artist who was able to predict the coming media saturation and the attendant cult of celebrity. His obsession with movie stars, some living, some dead, seems especially prophetic.

When Warhol came to make his portraits of Elvis Presley or Marilyn Monroe, it was essentially no different from making an image of an atom bomb explosion or the Kennedy assassination. He had access only to extant, mass media images. These were iconic but they were also constructed. Popular culture carefully manufactures its myths and icons. It finds them, modifies them, packages them and sells them. The movie star is as much of a product as a can of soup. If this sounds a fairly trite observation today, it must be said that it is the work of Pop Artists in general, and Warhol in particular, that has made it seem that way.

Again, it is hard to know from our current standpoint how far Warhol was extraordinarily prescient in choosing to depict Elvis and Marilyn, or whether Elvis and Marilyn have achieved their colossal iconic status partly as a result of Warhol using them in his art. No doubt a little of both. Certainly being portrayed by Warhol wasn't enough to turn Troy Donohue into an icon, but his portraits of Liz Taylor and Natalie Wood have certainly conferred a sort of symbolic status on them that they might otherwise lack.

Even in these portraits, of course, a selection process was going on. We know that Warhol owned many movie and publicity stills and part of his skill as an artist lay in choosing just the right one to use in his work. The single image he selected of Marilyn Monroe was one that contained her essence and could bear the weight of the many reworkings he made of it. By contrast, the still he used for his Elvis portraits (Elvis in western gear with a gun) derives much of its power from being slightly atypical. The more truly iconic Elvis would be curling his lip and shaking his pelvis. By the time Warhol has added a couple of slightly out of register red lips, this is no longer the Elvis we are used to at all.

Warhol's later symbolic subject matter — guns, skulls, daggers, shadows, endangered species, the hammer and sickle — certainly provide images with plenty of weight and significance, yet they seem

to come less directly from the world of Pop.

The bottom line is that a work of art doesn't achieve its power simply because it uses powerful subject matter. A work of art is not *about* an object, it *is* an object, an object that we want and need to look at. Warhol always makes us want to look.

It can hardly be emphasized enough how skillfully and brilliantly Warhol uses colour and composition. His paintings seem almost scientific in their ability to engage us and draw our attention. This is why Warhol's work is not simply Duchampian, not simply a matter of signing soup cans, of simply asserting that art is what the artist says it is. Warhol's work is great art because it enthralls the viewer and connects at the very deepest level.

Summary

Pop Art takes as its subject consumption, popular culture and the mass media.

Its subject matter is always 'quoted'.

It was a reaction against the high seriousness of Abstract Expressionism.

Pop Art blurred, probably forever, the distinction between high and low art.

4 Warhol the Portraitist

Andy Warhol's quip that, 'In the future everybody will be famous for 15 minutes', which first appeared in the catalogue for a show he had in Stockholm in 1968, is the most quoted and most misunderstood of all Warhol's many public utterances.

These days the line is generally used to criticize or dismiss someone who has briefly and apparently for no good reason found themselves in the limelight. They are denounced with the put-down, 'Your 15 minutes is up'. These briefly famous people have supposedly got something they don't deserve or aren't entitled to, and now they can return to an ignominious and deserved obscurity. Once their 15 minutes is up, fame will presumably be left to the people who more truly deserve it.

Apart from the fact that there is something very snobbish and condescending about this attitude, I also think it is pretty much the exact opposite of what Warhol actually had in mind.

Warhol loved fame. He loved it in himself and in others. He aspired to it. He achieved it. He worked hard to keep it and increase it. You would not have found him complaining about the 'problems' of being famous. From this standpoint he would inevitably think that fame was something everybody might enjoy given half a chance.

And so, adopting one of his (admittedly not always wholly convincing) poses, that of the Coke-drinking, Campbell's-soup-eating democrat, he made the not very startling observation that fame is rather unfairly and unequally distributed. Far more original was the idea that, at least in theory, at least on a temporary basis, and certainly somewhat ironically, the world might be a better place if fame were shared out more fairly, or at least passed around.

It is hard to tell if Warhol was ever much of a reader, and even if he were he would surely have gone to some lengths to disguise the fact, but this concept of the regular redistribution of fame and fortune is very similar to the plot of a short story by Jorge Luis Borges called *The Lottery In Babylon* in which society is constantly reformulated on the basis of chance, so that at some time or another everybody has been a leader and everybody has been a slave. One is also reminded of Warhol's own remark in his book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*;

"If everybody's a beauty, then nobody is." (p.62).

In a certain limited way, at the Factory, Warhol practised what he preached. He created his own superstars, people who were certainly not stars outside the Warhol circle, and some of them weren't even very 'super' within it. Ingrid Superstar, for example, was a potato-faced girl from New Jersey whose aspirations to stardom seemed at

best misplaced. Within the circle, however, she was a somebody. Warhol, of course, reserved the right to say who was this week's superstar and who was not.

Members of the Factory crowd seem to have put a great deal of effort into pleasing Andy, into being his favourites. Whether they wanted to be famous for 15 minutes or longer, whether they wanted to be stars or not, they certainly wanted Warhol's approval. They wanted to be insiders.

Was Andy Warhol really interested in people? Ultimately the answer has to be yes, if a qualified yes. You don't spend as much time surrounded by as many people as Warhol did, and you certainly don't spend as much time photographing, tape recording and filming them, if you are simply indifferent to them. Warhol could, after all, have stayed with the soup cans and the electric chairs. But perhaps he was interested in people the way an old-style lepidopterist is interested in butterflies. He observes them, studies them, is fascinated by them, but ultimately he wants to capture them, skewer them on a pin, and add them to his collection.

Warhol seems to have met every celebrity of his era, everyone worth knowing, plus many, many who weren't. The number of people he made portraits of, either as paintings, prints or silk-screens, or simply by taking their photograph, is astonishing. Bob Colacello, the editor of *Interview*, puts the number in the tens of thousands. Imelda Marcos was one of the few he wanted but couldn't get.

The list of his subjects reads like a who's who of his times, and includes Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, Muhammad Ali, Grace Jones, Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, Rudolph Nureyev, Paul Anka, Philip Johnson, Merce Cunningham, Man Ray, Mickey Mouse, Joseph Beuys, Chairman Mao, Lenin, Jerry Hall, Albert Einstein, and of course, above all, Marilyn Monroe. If some of these names seem more significant and familiar than others, that is a sign of our own times as well as of Warhol's.

Latterly Warhol was really only interested in making portraits of the rich and famous, although there were times when he would make an exception and accept a portrait commission from those who were merely rich.

At the start of his career he didn't know anybody who was famous at all. In the 1950s he was making drawings of what look like male models, but these are referred to in the catalogues as 'Untitled' so hardly qualify as portraits. He also made a lot of drawings of a store owner called Stephen Bruce who sold Warhol's art through his store, but when it came to real stars he knew them only from media images, the way any other member of the public did. And so he made his first portraits using images taken from magazines and newspapers.

There are a number of pencil drawings he made in 1962 of Joan Crawford, Hedy Lamarr and Ginger Rogers that explicitly reveal their sources to be publicity stills and movie magazines.

Even after he had achieved a certain level of success as an artist, it was not, at first, the kind of success that brought him into contact with Hollywood stars. His portraits of Brando, Elvis and Liz Taylor again came from printed sources.

♦

Marilyn Monroe

Warhol's portraits of Marilyn Monroe were necessarily taken from photographs, since he began using her image only after her death, and of course his paintings of her are not portraits in the same way that his silk-screens of, say, Mick Jagger or Grace Jones are. They are in no sense taken from life. They all manipulate and use Marilyn's image for aesthetic or symbolic effect. They celebrate her image and perhaps her life, but by no means are all of them glamorous, and some of them are downright eerie. They show her face as a mask, somewhere between a life-mask and a death-mask. They remind us of beauty and death in equal proportions.

The *Marilyn Diptych** of 1962, for example, is two vast canvas panels each with 25 Marilyn faces, arranged in a five by five grid.

≡ Diptych: a painting made on two joined but detachable panels.

The left half shows more or less identical images but they're garishly coloured, the hair is bright yellow, the lips fire engine red, the skin bubble gum pink.

The right panel has 25 images printed in black straight onto the canvas, some so heavily inked as to be almost obliterated, while others fade out into nothingness towards the top right corner of the panel. As a metaphor for the transience of glamour and beauty, for the inevitability of death, particularly of a movie star, this fading and thinning of colour and ink is just about perfect.

Marilyn's Lips, also 1962, is another diptych, this time showing long rows of Marilyn's slightly parted lips. They are disembodied, floating on the canvas, and the piece seems to contain references to Man Ray's lips in the sky, to Dali's Mae West sofa, perhaps even to Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat. But essentially the lips look stamped out, mass produced; the icon is reduced to its detachable elements.

In all the Marilyns, the use of different, often 'wrong', colours profoundly affects the way we read the face. They are like the effects produced by make-up or perhaps by changes in movie lighting. There is a 1967 portfolio of ten silk-screens, each 36 inches square, each using a different set of colours. Some colour combinations leave Marilyn's glamour more or less intact (if a little cartoonish and overstated), and the image remains that of the Marilyn we know.

Others do violence to the image, transform it, leaving Marilyn looking sinister or sickly or deathly.

You could, if you wanted, read some misogyny into this manipulation and distortion of the face of a beautiful woman. Marilyn's beauty is toyed with, falsified, sometimes destroyed; but that doesn't seem to be quite what Warhol is up to. The obsession and fascination, with glamour, transience and death feels genuine.

When Warhol came to revisit these images of Marilyn in the Reversal series made between 1977 and 1986 he created a number of works called *Multi-colored Marilyns*, sometimes using as few as four repeated images, sometimes using as many as 18. But multi-coloured isn't the most obvious way you would describe them. The canvases are mostly black. Repeated images of Marilyn, as though in a black and white photographic negative, cover most of the surface, and a background wash of colours shows through in just a few places, where the eyes, eyebrows and lips are. The teeth however, because white in the orginal, are now an alarming dense black. The image of Marilyn Monroe is still just about recognizable, although arguably it wouldn't be if we hadn't seen it in so many Warhol silk-screens, but now she looks like a ghost, something sinister and deathly, something from the other side. These are true portraits of the dead Marilyn Monroe.

Perhaps Warhol's most controversial early portraits were those of the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*. The architect Philip Johnson had designed the New York State Pavilion for the 1964 World's Fair, and he gave a number of Pop Artists space on the outside of the building to display their art.

Warhol silk-screened 13 grainy portraits, police mug shots of what we must now call 'alleged criminals'. The work consisted of 25 panels, each four feet square, showing side and front views of the men, and since some of the panels were left blank, not every man was shown in both views.

Trouble came because, according to Johnson, these 13 men weren't really the most wanted at all. Some had already been caught, served their time and released, and some of them were living at home with their families. Under pressure from the Fair's organizers and amid accusations of censorship, the panels were duly sprayed silver.

Once again Warhol went for fame if not glamour. The men in the portraits certainly look brutish, aggressive and disreputable, but Warhol is not simply celebrating their status as criminals, he is portraying them because he thought they were the most famous criminals at that moment, the *top 13* criminals.

In fact it appears that Warhol would have been quite content to continue using extant images as the basis of his art. It was largely the fear of legal action by the copyright owners of the photographs that

made him stop. Warhol was becoming rich enough to be worth suing.

He saw the advantages of creating his own source material, and because of his own growing fame he was soon in a position to meet and portray the kinds of subject who had once seemed to belong to a quite different world. These people did not 'sit' for their portrait in quite the way that a subject would sit for a more conventional portrait painter. Rather they took part in a photoshoot with a make-up person and many assistants. Warhol would take a great many Polaroids of them and then work from a photograph rather than from life.

These sessions had many witnesses and are the source of numerous anecdotes. Victor Bockris, for example, reports on the session when Warhol travelled to photograph Muhammad Ali at his training camp in Pennsylvania. Ali delivers endless ranting monologues on the evils of racism, prostitution and homosexuality, while Warhol clicks away with his Polaroid camera and is finally moved to say to Ali;

"Could we do some where you're not…er, talking?" (in *Traveler's Digest*, Winter 1977, pp.3–5).

The Ali session was part of his series of portraits of American sports stars, a reasonably Warholian theme, and his portraits of certain iconic Pop celebrities seemed fair enough. But his active pursuit of Imelda Marcos or the Shah of Iran, desperately wanting them to be his subjects, showed not only a blind quest for money, but arguably an absence of moral sensibility.

However, although Warhol may have been a court painter, of sorts, the best of his portraits of the famous are surprisingly revelatory. They don't take the celebrities quite at their own value, and it is not simply a matter of making them look bad or ugly as a way of cutting them down to size. His portrait of Jane Fonda, for example, does not appear deliberately unflattering, her glamour remains essentially intact, and yet the portrait also reveals an anxiety, a tension, a steely hostility that one had always suspected yet never quite seen in the actress.

A lot of the rich and powerful men look like very nasty pieces of work indeed, and many of the beautiful women appear self-regarding and empty. In a telephone call to David Bourdon, quoted in Bourdon's *Warhol* he claimed;

"I can make ordinary people look good but I have trouble making beautiful people look good."

It would be pointless to make any great claims for Warhol as a scathing social critic, but a remark like that suggests that he wasn't quite the uncritical poodle that a lot of people try to make him out to have been.

Warhol's own role as both insider and outsider is a curious one.

Growing up poor in Pittsburgh, his contact with the world of fame and glamour was as distant as anyone else's. He went to the movies, read movie magazines, then he wrote to some of the stars asking for signed photographs. Not everybody would have taken that final step of trying to make contact with the stars, and you might argue that this indicated he was more than just the average movie-goer. Equally, you could think it was an action that in someone else would have confirmed forever their status as nothing more than a fan, as someone who would always be on the outside looking in, pressing his face against the glass.

Warhol's success meant that he moved to the other side of that glass. By the 1970s Warhol might have appeared to be the ultimate insider. He was a friend of Liz Taylor and Liza Minelli, he was inviting Bianca Jagger to stay at his estate in Montauk. He was meeting (and admittedly occasionally sparring with) Hollywood's old royalty — with Gloria Swanson, Claudette Colbert, Bette Davis, Lauren Bacall. He was as big a star as any of them and probably richer than most. The wheel might seem to have come full circle for the movie fan from Pittsburgh, but it was never quite as simple as that. Warhol the star remained starstruck.

Whenever he encountered these stars he had his camera and his tape recorder with him; the tools of the undying fan. Also, of course, the tools of the paparazzo and the investigative journalist. One wonders if he sometimes carried an autograph album.

Warhol may have felt the need for props. The photographer at the party is always popular and never has to account for himself. And perhaps the camera and tape recorder were also used as a shield that saved him the trouble of having to engage directly with the world. But they must surely also have created an impermeable barrier between Warhol and the stars he was so keen to meet. At the very least they must have forced the stars to keep their guard up, to remain in their star persona. And this, I suppose, is what a true fan might very well want. He would be far more interested in the star's public image than in any private reality behind it.

There is a very telling, also quite funny, photograph in *Exposures* of Bianca Jagger apparently shaving her armpit, and one's first impression might be that this is a candid picture, that Warhol has caught Bianca off guard, and is offering us a candid glimpse of her as we have never seen her before. But when you look more closely at the photograph, you see that there is no shaving foam in the armpit, indeed there is no hair to be shaved off. Bianca is posing for the camera. She is a star pretending to have a candid moment, caught by Warhol.

Of course this is just fine with Warhol. The kind of exposure he is

concerned with (here at least) is more that of publicity than of revelation. It remains, however, a very appealing picture of Bianca Jagger.

♦

Warhol the self-portraitist

As I said in the introduction, I'm deeply suspicious of the idea that 'Warhol was his own greatest creation'. Yes, he most certainly created an image for himself, both visually and philosophically, and it was an appealing and attention-grabbing image, and a great help in getting publicity, but without the art it would have been meaningless. After all, his superstar Ultraviolet presented the most striking visual image to the world, but what good did it do her? Looking at it the other way, the artist Joseph Beuys has an instantly recognizable image, but it has hardly made him a household name like Warhol.

Self-portraits of Warhol exist from as early as 1942, and in his senior year at the Carnegie Institute, 1948-49, he caused a stir by entering a self-portrait in a college show. The work was rejected. It was called *The Broad Gave Me My Face, But I Can Pick My Own Nose*, and although the painting does indeed show a Warhol-like character picking his nose, it is surely the punning, frivolous title with its casual insult to motherhood, that caused offence rather than the image itself.

There is obviously a reference to plastic surgery in that title, and we know that Warhol was very unhappy about his own appearance, going so far as to have facial plastic surgery in 1957. He regarded the operation as a failure.

Warhol is hardly the first art student to have spent a lot of time experimenting with his own look, drawing himself, taking a lot of pictures of himself in photobooths. And obviously there is a long and noble tradition of artists who have created self-portraits.

It seems to me that rather too much is made of Warhol's alleged blankness. The face that gazes out from the self-portraits is certainly immobile and not obviously expressive, but it is possible to see a variety of things in it: a severity, a wariness, perhaps a sort of inert hostility. At other times he looks alarmed, deathly, deliberately grotesque.

Warhol's look is always iconic, but it is not fixed, especially in the beginning. Early photographs show him as a bespectacled, bow-tie wearing dandy or nerd. The look is unusual but not fashionable or cool or Pop. By the time of the Factory years Warhol looks far more current, as though he might be a member of a pop group, in Beatle boots, hooped tee-shirt and dark glasses. Dark glasses are always a reinforcement of cool, and suggest a distance, a detachment, a refusal to look the world in the eye, or to let the world see into yours. But the photographs from these years, and there are a great many of them, are

generally created by others. When it came to making his own self-portraits he generally took the shades off.

Over the years, in his self-portraits, he subjected his own image to most of the same transformations that he used in his portraits of other people; multiple repetitions, the use of garishly inappropriate colours. He also treats himself more harshly than he does most of his subjects. Sometimes he looks just terrible: sinister, sickly, sometimes with camouflage colours blotched across his face, sometimes done out in terrible drag, in bad make-up and wigs.

It is hard to say quite what the wig meant to Warhol. Certainly, it hid his bald head, but it also drew attention to the fact that he was bald. Perhaps he was embracing falseness as a Pop joke, refusing to make a pretence, or at least revealing the pretence, but that doesn't altogether explain why the wigs had to be quite so cheap and nasty looking. Did he know how ridiculous he sometimes looked? And did he care? And was that the whole point?

Photographs of Warhol's house, unseen until after his death, show Warhol wigs framed behind glass, looking like alarming, giant spiders, which suggest he was well aware of how strange and absurd they looked. Perhaps there was a sort of masochism going on here. If a man perceives himself as ugly and sexually unattractive, he may well decide to embrace that ugliness rather than disguise it, and make himself look even uglier.

Warhol's self-portraits, as works of art, are not in themselves ugly, of course. Once again art transforms the banal or the ordinary into something beautiful and startling. This is art's power, and in creating his self-portraits Warhol took control of that power and exercised it to transform his own image.

Summary

Warhol met and made portraits of thousands of the most famous personalities of his era.

His portraits often deal with the media image as much as with the 'real' person.

Warhol became a 'society portraitist' but his work is not always flattering or uncritical.

In his self-portraits he is at least as hard on himself as he is on others.

5 Warhol and Film

Warhol's films came to public attention as part of the American *underground film movement**, a term that seemed a little unhelpful even at the time.

≡ Term used to describe a loose association of 1960s American experimental filmmakers. The films were anti-Hollywood and anti-mainstream, and took much of their inspiration from the 1960s obsession with sex, drugs and rock and roll.

Its practitioners were a diverse group that included among many, many others, Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, Jack Smith and Kenneth Anger. With hindsight it is hard to see that these film-makers had very much in common with each other artistically; Mekas was using film as a personal diary, Brakhage was creating a version of 'poetic film', Anger (despite using the kind of performers who might have found their way into a Warhol movie) was supposedly using film as a form of black magic. Jack Smith was far closer to Warhol, with his films that featured drag queens, movie monsters and also involved a kind of willed amateurishness.

To a greater or lesser extent, a lack of professionalism was forced on all underground film-makers, partly because they lacked large budgets, and also because they often lacked professional skills, but they all tried to make a virtue of it. They rejected the values of mainstream filmmaking, decrying it as glib, safe and crassly commercial. Once freed from the yoke of the mainstream, film-makers were able to pursue a more eccentric and individual vision, and one that frequendy included a sexual explicitness that mainstream cinema couldn't hope to match. This latter was a strategy that brought them a far larger audience than they might otherwise have had.

Warhol was not in at the very beginning of the underground film movement, but he quickly became familiar with the genre and was soon by far the most famous, acclaimed, and indeed commercially successful member of this rather disunited group.

P. Adams Sitney seems to have been onto something when he writes in his book *Visionary Film* that;

"Warhol turned his genius for parody and reduction against the American avant-garde itself."

Warhol's movies do indeed seem to be simultaneously the genuine article yet also a send-up of the whole idea of experimental film. Certain strategies that other film-makers took very seriously become wry jokes in Warhol's work.

However, the term parody suggests a level of sustained engagement that is far more studied than anything Warhol ever

attempted. What he did bring to a frequently over-earnest and high-minded group was a coolness, a glamour — even if a frequently tawdry sort — and a deadpan sense of humour.

Between 1963 and 1968 Warhol made many hundreds of films, although in this context we might well ask exactly what constitutes a film, or at least a finished work. Certain 'films' consisted simply of unedited reels of footage, shown exactly as they had been returned from the lab. Others were amalgams, put together from largely unrelated footage. Films were cannibalized, reels were removed from apparently completed works and then made to stand alone or inserted into entirely different works.

One might also ask in what sense Warhol was the 'maker' of some of these films. Often his creative input consisted of little more than turning on the camera and then walking away. Be that as it may, the results are uniquely his. Anyone can turn on a camera, but turning on a camera doesn't guarantee making a Warhol (or even a Warholesque) movie.

One reason for the high number of films is that a great many of them were three-minute 'screen tests'. When Warhol first bought his movie camera, anyone entering the Factory was made to sit down and confront the camera while a roll of film passed through it. Later these short films were put into compilations such as *13 Most Beautiful Boys* and *13 Most Beautiful Women* (both 1964-65), and *50 Fantastics and 50 Personalities* (1964-66). Subjects include Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Dennis Hopper, Baby Jane Holzer, Ivy Nicholson and Edie Segdwick.

These are some of Warhol's most appealing and yet rigorous works, and it must be said that Gerard Malanga is generally credited as their co-creator. There is no soundtrack. The camera is fixed on a tripod, the subject is framed head and shoulders, the lighting is harsh, the image is grainy black and white. There is a beauty to these films but it is not of the comforting sort. They manage to be both casual yet formal.

These films look better and better as time goes by and they certainly reinforce Warhol's claims as a great portraitist. Although neither camera nor subject are in the ordinary sense 'doing' anything, an act of revelation nevertheless frequently occurs. The camera's steady gaze reveals the subject, forces the subject to reveal him or herself in a way that many more engaged forms of film-making might not.

The most appealing results come when the sitters remain still and blank. If they try to do too much, try too hard to put on a show, the camera manages to expose them. Baby Jane Holzer, for example, is a beautiful woman but on screen she always seems to be posing and pouting for the camera. She looks fake. This ability of the camera to

see into and through people is at the very heart of what cinema is and what it can do.

The casts for Warhol's movies were taken from his life. There is the notion that one might have just turned up at the Factory and found oneself in a Warhol film. This apparently happened to Joe Dalessandro who went on to have a reasonably successful career in the movies, and also to a young man called Joe Spencer the eponymous hero of *Bike Boy*, who never appeared in another movie ever again. Yet for all Warhol's open-door policy there was clearly a rather rigorous selection process going on. Hustlers, pretty boys, socialites, members of the art world, drag queens and bikers were welcome, but just plain folks, uncool people, members of the 'straight' world, did not find themselves invited to appear in Warhol's movies.

Certain of the early films might be considered as works of conceptual art: *Sleep* (1963) is a five-hour film of a man (John Giorno) sleeping; *Eat* (1964) shows a man taking over 30 minutes to eat a single mushroom; *Kiss* (1963), consists of footage of various couples kissing; and most spectacularly *Empire* (1964) is an eight-hour film of the Empire State Building, from sunset to sunrise.

A mere description is enough to suggest how these films interrogate the nature of cinema, how they challenge notions of audience expectation and endurance, and yet they are not conceptual in the way that, say, Tony Conrad's movie *The Flicker* (1965) is. This is a film that physically consists only of lengths of clear and black film, so that flashes of light appear on the screen interspersed with periods of complete darkness. Andy Warhol might have liked that idea, but it doesn't sound like a Warhol movie. And even though one reel of *Empire* is more or less entirely black you feel that this is a campy joke at the expense of Warhol's own technical failings as much as it is an attempt at deconstruction.

Warhol's early films are given a soft, dreamlike, possibly drug-like, atmosphere by being deliberately shown in slow motion. They were filmed at 24 frames per second, the speed of sound film, then projected at 16 frames per second, the speed of silent film. Incidentally, today's silent films are projected at 18 frames per second so we generally don't see Warhol's films in quite the way a contemporary audience did. Stan Brakhage is famously reported to have watched *Empire* at 24 frames per second and found it empty and unsatisfactory, but on watching it again at 16, he was able to declare it a masterpiece.

Warhol's movies embody a private history of the cinema. After making a great many silent movies he discovered sound, although admittedly the soundtracks of some of his movies are more or less unintelligible. Next he discovered scripts, or at least scenarios, often

by the poet and playwright Ronald Tavel. Often, in a very loose imitation of the Hollywood Studio system, these movies were also 'vehicles' for various Factory superstars: Mario Montez, Ivy Nicholson, Gerard Malanga. They had titles such as *Suicide, Horse, Vinyl, Hedy, More Milk Yvette, The Closet*.

Stephen Koch, author of *Stargazer*, the definitive book on Warhol's movies, and a vigorous though far from uncritical champion of the works, describes some of these early sound films as 'bad to a degree that is barely credible' (p.65).

Certainly in some of Warhol's films it is difficult to separate avant-garde aesthetic strategies from simple indifference or incompetence. In his memoir *POPism* (p.240), Warhol tells of a falling out with Taylor Mead because Warhol shot a film featuring Mead, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac but in such a way that you couldn't tell who was who. The reel was then lost altogether. Mead denounced Warhol for being irresponsible and inept, a charge that would seem pretty much undeniable, but Warhol apparently found such an accusation as absurd as it was irrelevant.

This celebration of willed ineptitude reaches a sort of zenith with *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965) starring Edie Sedgwick. It is a two-reeler, the first 33-minute reel of which is entirely out of focus. Originally both reels were out of focus because of technical problems with the lens. Warhol reshot the film, an unheard-of occurrence in the Warhol universe, but then he decided to keep one reel from each version for the final movie.

It is not an easy film to watch, but then boredom and endurance are always aesthetic issues in Warhol's films; right from the start he talked about making a 24-hour movie. Sometimes the endurance may be emotional as well as temporal.

Beauty #2 (1965) again features Edie Sedgwick, sitting on a bed wearing just a bra and briefs, and looking gorgeous. A good-looking young man is on the bed with her and he makes desultory attempts to kiss and fondle her. She, however, is distracted, since off-screen an unseen actor (Chuck Wein) subjects her to a series of vicious insults and taunts.

There is little sense of anything being scripted and Sedgwick looks as though she is being genuinely tormented. She tries to keep her cool but doesn't quite manage it. There is something genuinely unpleasant, even sadistic, about events on screen, and certainly the audience is implicated. You ask yourself why Sedgwick doesn't just get up and leave — after all this is 'only' a film. At the same time you may ask yourself why you don't stop watching, and the simple answer is because Sedgwick is so watchable. She has a genuine screen presence that many Warhol superstars lacked, and although the movie doesn't

have anything resembling a narrative, there is a great deal of tension and you keep watching in a horrified, fascinated way to see what happens next.

The performers in Warhol films are often treated, and treat each other, very badly. There is often an undercurrent of hostility, which sometimes erupts into real physical violence. In this sense there is certainly something sadistic and voyeuristic in the films, and yet you also feel there is a kind of skewed humanism there. Warhol is interested in people and likes to watch them. He isn't indifferent. He wants to see what they will do next, and as viewers we are made to share his voyeuristic urge.

Warhol experienced considerable commercial success with *Chelsea Girls* (1966). It is his most accessible film in several senses, and even though it was originally intended to be three-and-a-half hours long, projected onto twin screens with the projectionist selecting between soundtracks, it is often shown on a single screen, in an edited version that lasts about 90 minutes.

Although without narrative in the conventional sense, it does have a comprehensible if very loose structure. It consists of segments showing scenes from the lives of people who are ostensibly living in New York's Chelsea Hotel, a long-notorious hang-out for artists, Bohemians and their hangers-on.

It is possible to read the film as a quasi-documentary about the inhabitants of Warhol's world. The performers, if not exactly acting, are at least improvising for the camera, and sometimes the performances lurch into psychodrama, which can be threatening and disturbing. There is an improvised mother/son argument between Marie Menken and Gerard Malanga, footage of Eric Emerson talking his way through an LSD-trip while 'psychedelic' lights play over his naked body, and just occasionally there is something as benign as Nico trimming her fringe.

The most famous scene, generally known as the 'Pope Ondine' sequence, has the actor of that name hearing the improvised confession of an actress, Rona Page, who is clearly out of her depth, and the scene rapidly gets out of hand. Ondine's performance is more intense, witty, skilful, in every way more engaging than that of his co-star. She isn't his equal as a performer and when she calls him a 'phony' he is thrown into an unassuagable temper tantrum which involves throwing a drink, slapping the actress across the face and going into an intense rant about her phoniness.

It is an exquisitely unbearable scene to watch. The actress really does get hit, Ondine's anger is real, and although one knows that all of this is being done largely for the benefit of the camera and the audience, one is nevertheless watching something very risky and

authentic. There is something abusive and exploitative about the whole episode, and yet Ondine's performance is brilliant and utterly compelling. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else in cinema.

Much nonsense has always been written about Warhol's cinema. Peter Gidal writes of *Lonesome Cowboys*, a very camp and only intermittently funny western spoof;

"…he [Warhol] manages to use a common situation rather than an eccentric one: the game of being a cowboy on the range. He chooses the most crucified subject-matter and remakes it, returns it to its mythical archetypal importance, but now as an alternative, as a radical ideal, not as a worn-out history."

This doesn't seem entirely absurd until you actually watch the movie, at which point it becomes utterly irrelevant. It just seems to be an example of the critic proving he is cleverer than the artist.

The problem for critics is that Warhol's art is endlessly subversive, and it certainly subverts much high-brow criticism. He refuses to take himself quite as seriously as his critics would like him to. Stephen Koch in *Stargazer* writes about a notorious food fight in *The Loves of Ondine* (1967-68) and says;

"One cannot decide whether to call it loathsome or merely hilarious."

The movie tries to recapture the intensity of Ondine's performance in *Chelsea Girls*, but here it seems rather forced. He exercises his camp, scabrous wit in a series of improvised encounters with the likes of Viva and Pepper Davis, but then 'for no reason' (according to Koch) the scene changes and we are watching some skimpily dressed Hispanic men throwing milk and flour at each other. They do this for a very, very long time.

Koch is outraged and insulted that this is 'the featured segment of the film made by the most conspicuous cineast of the avant-garde immediately after his major public and artistic triumph' (he is speaking about *Chelsea Girls*). And, of course, in one sense, Koch is absolutely 'right' to be outraged. The scene is indeed puerile and tedious, and very much not the kind of scene you would include in a movie if you wanted to be regarded as a serious avant-garde film-maker. But the fact that Warhol included it seems to give him the ultimate victory. If you are going to be truly subversive you obviously also have to subvert the notion of the serious avant-garde film-maker. This doesn't, of course, make the food fight scene any more bearable to watch.

Warhol concluded his private history of the cinema by becoming a namebrand producer, rather than a hands-on director. His shooting by Solanas certainly played a major part in this, but one also feels that by 1968 he had probably done all he could with the form.

Later Warhol movies such as *Flesh* (1968), *Trash* (1970) and *Heat* (1972) were directed and largely conceived by Paul Morrissey. They tend to be rather sneered at these days but were well regarded at the time, and Warhol was happy enough to put his name to them. They seem to belong to the world of commerce rather than art, although there is certainly still nothing very slick or professional about them. They are populated by typical Warhol characters — hookers, junkies, transvestites — but they feel like movies about the Warhol milieu rather than being a product of it. Later there were a couple of horror movie parodies, one of Dracula and one of Frankenstein, which were just dreadful.

Whether Warhol's movies have any lasting influence beyond the art world is debatable. They are essentially *sui generis*. They were of their time, there had never been anything like them before and there is never likely to be anything quite like them ever again.

Summary

Warhol was part of the American 'underground film' movement.

Warhol's early films can be regarded as conceptual, later ones are more like documentaries about the world he moved in.

His work represents a personal history of the cinema.

By 1968 he seemed to have exhausted the possibilities of what he could do with film.

6 Warhol's Other Projects

After his death, when Christie's came to value the Andy Warhol estate, they took a look at the 100,000 or so photographs he had left behind and concluded that they were worth the grand sum of $107,000. With some notable, expensive exceptions they calculated that the majority of the standard prints were worth a dollar each, and that the Polaroids were worth five cents.

Now, it is perfectly possible to believe that many of these photographs were just disposable test shots and the like, but obviously Warhol had chosen not to dispose of them, and in any case, anonymous, nondescript old photographs sell for more than that at flea markets.

Christie's explained that they had arrived at this amazingly low figure because they considered Warhol to be only a painter, not a photographer of any repute. All the money and the art was therefore in the paintings and nowhere else. Needless to say their assessment was not allowed to go unchallenged. Exhibitions had been held of Warhol's photographs. He had used photographs as the basis for portraits. He had published photographic books. The estate managed to find an expert witness who valued the same collection of photographs at $80 million. As I write, an Internet company is selling some of the Warhol Polaroids, apparently very successfully, for $12,500 each.

Even leaving aside the matter of the photographs, the idea that Warhol was *only* a painter is patently absurd. Throughout his career he worked in other media, and created a number of sometimes minor yet always distinctive works. He was, for example, responsible for two of the most striking record album covers ever designed.

The first, *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1967), shows a big yellow and black banana on a plain white background. In the original edition the skin of the banana peeled off to reveal the flesh beneath. A large Andy Warhol 'signature' appears in the bottom right-hand corner of the cover, as though that might be the name of the recording artist. The image of the banana is simultaneously provocative and silly. Yes, the banana is a crude, obvious phallic symbol, but how could anyone seriously take this bald, cartoonish image as a symbol of anything? Beck (Hanson, the musician) says of it;

"It's so blank it says everything and nothing." (in *Vanity Fair*, November 2001, p.216).

Far more 'something' is the cover of the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* (1971) featuring a close-up of a man's bulging, be-jeaned crotch complete with an actual zipper that opens. The result is funny,

sexy, very faintly shocking, somewhat in bad taste: everything that rock music is supposed to be. It is extraordinarily original, yet so completely obvious that you can't quite believe somebody hadn't thought of it before.

These album covers are perfect pieces of commercial art. They draw attention to themselves and to the product within. Here, Warhol's art is satisfyingly functional. He did a similarly successful job on the poster he designed for George McGovern's presidential campaign in 1972. It is very hard to think of Warhol as a political animal, but this poster was a wonderful piece of *agitprop**.

≡ Literally a political strategy involving techniques of agitation and propaganda to influence public opinion. Originally used by the Marxist theorist Plekhano and then by Lenin.

It simply shows a Warhol-style portrait of the rival candidate, Richard Nixon, looking sour, surly, jowly, shifty, green-faced, very much the sort of man you wouldn't by a used car from let alone choose as president; and underneath it is the simple caption, 'Vote McGovern'.

The poster caused considerable outrage at the time, at least from members of the Republican Party, having supposedly crossed the line of what was acceptable as political debate. Warhol always claimed that Nixon was sufficiently offended that after he had won the election he turned the Inland Revenue Service on Warhol, having them go through his finances with a fine-tooth comb, looking for evidence of tax fraud.

Warhol also created a variety of what might be called sculptural objects. The best known of these are the Brillo and Campbell's soup boxes, but he also did boxes of Del Monte peaches, Heinz Tomato Ketchup and Kellogg's Cornflakes. These are not quite Duchampian ready-mades since Warhol didn't simply sign existing cardboard boxes, rather he went to the trouble of creating heavy wooden replicas instead. At other times he worked with helium-filled silver balloons, and huge inflatable versions of wrapped Baby Ruth chocolate bars.

Warhol made a few appearances in other people's movies, sometimes in quirky independent productions such as *Cocaine Cowboys* or *Blank Generation*, but he also appeared in something as mainstream as *Tootsie*. It will come as no surprise that he almost always played himself. Having perfected the Andy Warhol act he was hardly going to start playing other parts.

He never had a successful television show, although he did have a couple of unsuccessful ones. *Andy Warhol's TV* and *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes*. There have certainly been shorter, more ignominious television careers.

The reasons for television success and failure are mysterious at

the best of times, but for all of Warhol's instinctive understanding of the media, and for all his ability to manipulate them, we might have guessed that he would not be a big hit on his own chat show. Yes, he is iconic, and yes his connoisseurship of banality would not seem to be out of place on TV, but there are other qualities that television demands that Warhol did not possess and did not have any interest in. Warhol is not warm, and he is never ingratiating, and warmth and ingratiation are at the very heart of television.

Print was an area where he was far more likely to be successful, and *Interview*, still in business today, must surely be the longest-lived magazine ever founded by an artist. It would be hard to make any great claims for *Interview* as a work of art, although it did contain a lot of material created by Warhol. He supposedly set up the magazine in order to get tickets to movie premieres.

Interview's speciality was the unmediated, unedited, tape-recorded interview. Occasionally these might be with a literary figure or a politician, but they were far more likely to be with rather vacuous media figures — Sean Cassidy, Cher and Lorna Luft spring immediately to mind. One might argue that the magazine was giving these people enough rope to hang themselves, but all too often it seemed that the vacuity was part of the magazine's personality as well as the celebrity's.

One could also argue that in this uncritical acceptance of celebrity, Warhol was once again ahead of the curve, anticipating the endless expansion of celebrity culture. And yet one might have to wonder whether *Interview* was the symptom or the disease.

Some people are under the impression that Andy Warhol was inarticulate, non-verbal, at best monosyllabic. It is not an entirely incomprehensible belief given an exchange like this with Henry Geldzahler of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

GELDZAHLER:
Do you know what you're doing?
WARHOL:
No.
GELDZAHLER:
Do you know what a painting is going to look like before you do it?
WARHOL:
Yes.
GELDZAHLER:
Does it end up looking like you expect?
WARHOL:
No.

GELDZAHLER:
Are you surprised?
WARHOL:
No.
(in *Painters Painting*)

This is undoubtedly monosyllabic, but it is certainly not inarticulate. Warhol is describing the way most artists work: head down, mostly in the dark, hoping for the best, with expectations and aspirations that are never quite fulfilled. He conveys this in precisely four words. So, let's not make the mistake of thinking that Warhol was ever non-verbal.

In fact there is considerable evidence that his utterances became deliberately more enigmatic as he went along. In an interview with Gene Swanson in *Art News* in 1963, he sounds very articulate and talks about art in a way that surely would have been acceptable to any art student or critic. He says;

"I think painting is essentially the same as it has always been. It confuses me that people expect Pop Art to make a comment or say that its adherents merely accept their environment. I've viewed most of the paintings I've loved — Mondrians, Matisses, Pollocks — as being rather deadpan in that sense. All painting is fact and that is enough; the paintings are charged with their very presence. The situation, physical ideas, physical presence — I feel that is the comment."

It is hard to imagine the later, fully-fledged Andy talking about paintings being 'charged' or even using the word 'adherents'. In that same interview he does talk about sameness and wanting to be like a machine — but he also relates it to *Brechtian alienation**.

≡ German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) employed what he called the Verfremdungseffekt, usually translated as 'alienation effect' but more correctly it means something that is 'made strange', i.e. a way of presenting things on stage in a non-naturalistic way to enable us to see them with fresh eyes.

For a visual artist, Andy Warhol wrote (or at least published) a great number of words. He was responsible for a book of his philosophy, a memoir of the 1960s, a novel of sorts, and a published diary that runs to over 800 pages (distilled from 20,000). His books of photographs also contain lengthy and rather droll ruminations.

There is, admittedly, some room for debate about the 'authorship' of these works. *Popism* is attributed to Warhol and Pat Hackett, but Bob Colacello claims to have been ghost writer on the project, and the work is copyright Andy Warhol. The title page of *Exposures* declares text by Warhol 'with Bob Colacello' and it is copyright 'Andy Warhol Books'. According to Victor Bockris *From A to B and Back Again* was;

"…culled from taped telephone conversations Warhol had with Brigid Polk and Pat Hackett, transcribed by Pat and shaped into final form by Bob (Colacello)." (Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*, p.390).

It too is simply 'copyright Andy Warhol'.

Regardless of how the resulting texts were actually created, the final product sounds like the authentic voice of Andy Warhol, and the Diary may be the most authentic of all. It contains a good deal of banality about which parties Warhol has been to, how much he spent on cab fares, some waspish remarks about the people he met, but then there will be some profoundly telling and well thought-out observation, such as this one from 12 August 1978:

"The Pope died and Brigid was calling, wanting me to watch the funeral on TV with her. When they brought the Pope's body out, everybody standing around there in Rome clapped, all these people, because it was such a good production."

This is the sort of observation that someone like Baudrillard would turn into a dreary 20-page analysis. Warhol pins it down with an apparent lack of effort. His genius manifests itself through a highly attractive lightness.

Lighter still is his way with the quote and the soundbite:

"In the future everyone will be famous for 15 minutes."

"I think everybody should be a machine."

"If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."

"My mind is like a tape recorder with one button — Erase.".

The best of these have already entered the culture and the language.

Warhol also created wallpaper, he was involved with 1960s 'happenings' via the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, and towards the end of his life he did some experiments with computer art.

Not all of these subsidiary projects were great art (though I think claims could be made for Warhol as one of the best diarists of the twentieth century, a latter-day Goncourt). However, his willingness to try new forms, to work in many media, and the prolificness, ease and playfulness with which he did them are typical of his genius, and made him an enduring model of what an artist could and should be at this time in history.

Summary

Warhol worked in many media besides painting and film.

His work as a designer of sculptural objects, album covers, and even a political poster, is of a piece with his more serious work.

Warhol was much more verbal than is generally supposed. His Diary is a classic, and he perfected the use of the soundbite.

7 Warhol and Repetition

In *Unacknowledged Legislations*, Christopher Hitchens draws our attention to an episode in Graham Greene's novel *Travels With My Aunt* where an English artist has begun painting pictures of Heinz soup cans. When someone points out that Andy Warhol has already made this area his own by painting Campbell's soup cans, the English artist protests and speaks of Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation;

"Botticelli wasn't put off because Piero della Francesca had done the same thing. He wasn't an *imitator*. And think of all the Nativities… In a way, you see, the more people who paint soup cans the better. It *creates* a culture. One nativity wouldn't have been any good at all. It wouldn't have been noticed." (pp.99-100).

Hitchens is absolutely right to describe this as a 'brilliant Warholian apercu' (in *Unacknowledged Legislations*, p. 172). And while we know that in reality Pop Artists largely tried to avoid trespassing on each other's graphic territory (Warhol, for instance, stopped painting cartoon superheroes once Roy Lichtenstein had made those his trademark), it is undeniable that if Warhol had simply painted one soup can, made one portrait of Marilyn, made one silk-screen of an electric chair, and so on, the effect would have been lost. The fact that he endlessly repeated himself was the whole point. And it was certainly noticed.

Obviously there are times when repetition can be simply boring or numbing, but this is by no means always the case. Boredom is always an aesthetic issue for Warhol, and sometimes he presented himself as a connoisseur of boredom, taking special pride in being able to find finding boring things very interesting.

We know that as a student Warhol attended a lecture by the avant-garde composer John Cage, and it was Cage who said;

"If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all."

This strikes me as another profoundly Warholian apercu.

Repetition as an avant-garde strategy goes back much further than either Warhol or Cage. Warhol surely would have recognized the French composer Erik Satie as a precursor and kindred spirit. In 1893 Satie composed *Vexations*, a piece of music consisting of 18 musical notes which have to be repeated 840 times. The first complete performance, organized by John Cage incidentally, was not until 1963, and it lasted 18 hours and 40 minutes.

Satie, in his way as much of a prankster as Warhol, regarded the

repetitiveness in his music as a form of rigorous spiritual exercise, like the ritualized repetition of prayers. One could make too much of Warhol's Catholic background, but certainly Catholicism, more than some religions, is one of rituals and repeated prayers, and also of icons.

Of course, the composer and the painter begin with very different materials and vocabularies. All western music is a variation on just 12 notes; theme and variations is a basic musical concept, and yet within this repetition there is endless, infinite possibility.

Pop music, of course, involves a deliberately restricted use of these possibilities, and most of the successful Pop Artists quickly identified themselves with a particular set of images or ideas that became their signature. Jasper Johns had his flags, Wesselman his American nudes, Hockney his swimming pools. Most visual artists find themselves coming back to the images and themes that obsess them, and yet Warhol takes obsession, as well as repetition and variation, to a new level.

If one Coke bottle is an arresting image, then how about a work, such as the 1962 *Green Coca-Cola Bottles*, which shows 102 of them on a canvas that is 8272 inches by 57?

Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, written in 1935, has become a vital text for much of the visual art of the twentieth century, but it has particular resonance for Andy Warhol. Benjamin writes;

"In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new."

Benjamin, coming from a hardline leftist perspective, believed that the existence of machines capable of making art would be profoundly democratic, that it would brush aside bourgeois ideas of art along with 'outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery'.

Given the price of Warhol's work today, this was at best a forlorn hope, and while it seems unlikely that Warhol ever sat down and read Benjamin's essay, he seems to have absorbed its message at source. Certainly Benjamin could have been prophesying the future work of Warhol when he wrote;

"To an ever greater degree, the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility."

Benjamin addressed the problem of what he called the 'aura' of works of art. Once a painting has achieved even the smallest amount of fame it will inevitably be more widely seen in reproduction than in

the original. We have all had the experience of encountering a work of art previously seen only in books or as a print, and found it strangely disappointing. The original seems much less vital and powerful than we were expecting, than we were wanting it to be. Its authenticity apparently counts for nothing. It may even seem less 'authentic' than the reproduction we are familiar with.

Warhol addressed this issue in several ways. First, his art frequently used images that were already reproductions to begin with, and therefore made no claims to authenticity: the postage stamp, the dollar bill, the publicity photograph. Every dollar bill is by definition as good as every other dollar bill. There is no 'original'. A publicity photograph is a machine-made print designed to do a very specific job. In making his own interventions on reproduced images such as the *Last Supper* and the *Mona Lisa*, Warhol was treating their reproduced images in much the same way.

Warhol took these endlessly reproducible images and reproduced them endlessly. Sometimes he would fill a whole gallery with versions and variations of a single image, whether this was his first show at the Ferus Gallery of 32 soup cans, or whether it was the 2000 Mao variations he exhibited at a gallery in Paris in 1974. There was, however, one very important difference between the images in those two exhibitions. The first soup cans were hand-painted oil paintings. The Maos were silk-screened.

Warhol started using silk-screens in 1962. He had previously experimented making multiple images with rubber stamps and wooden blocks but the silk-screen was to be by far his preferred method, and it completely changed the nature and the look of his art.

Silk-screening is essentially a form of stenciling. A screen of silk or similar material is stretched across a wooden frame, some sort of paper or card pattern is then placed on the screen and ink or paint is pressed through it using a squeegee and leaving an un-inked area where the pattern was. Warhol's technique was slightly more complex than this in that he generally used a photographic image as the basis for the pattern, but the principle was much the same.

Silk-screening was a cheap, and technically uncomplicated form of printing, which was just as well, given Warhol's professed lack of interest in the technicalities. He said;

"Oh, I just found a picture and gave it to the man, and he made the silk-screen, and I just took it and began printing. They all came out different because, I guess, I didn't really know how to screen." (*Painters Painting*, p.122).

Warhol may well have begun making silk-screens because he wanted to be able to put out a lot of products very quickly, but he made a virtue of necessity. Oil painting is a slow, intense, time-

consuming process, even when one is dealing with banal or repetitive subject matter. Perhaps also in a modern, 'Pop' world it seemed rather high-brow and old fashioned. Spontaneity, casualness, quick response — these are vital aspects of the Pop sensibility.

Silk-screens had the immediacy, and the apparent disposability, of a poster. They could be made briskly on a production line. They could even be made by others with greater or lesser degrees of supervision by Warhol.

Speaking of his soup cans he said;

"I tried doing them by hand, but I find it easier to use a screen. This way I don't have to work on my objects at all. One of my assistants, or anyone else for that matter, can reproduce the design as well as I could." (quoted in *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonee*, p.9).

As with many of Warhol's elegantly provocative statements this isn't entirely true.

Warhol was often quoted as saying that he wanted to be like a machine, and a machine, certainly a printing press or a photocopier, is able to reproduce the same identical image indefinitely. Printing is a ditto device, according to Marshall McLuhan, the media theorist and author of *The Medium is the Massage*.

But in using silk-screening as his means of production, Warhol was deliberately choosing a process that was very low-tech. The kind of machinery and the kind of mass production that Andy Warhol embraced here was of a distinctly cottage industry variety. And as Warhol said, results varied.

Silk-screening is a very hands-on process. However careful or skilled the inker is (and some of Warhol's assistants were neither), there are likely to be variations in the amount of ink and pressure applied, and the final images will be similarly non-identical. It is a machine process that leaves behind traces of the human being who uses it. Warhol made this work entirely to the advantage of his art.

It is all too easy for the repetition of an image to reduce its impact. It may make us immune to its beauty or its horror, and blind to its meaning. Inevitably we have come to know the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the atom bomb explosions, the race riots of the 1960s as a series of vivid media images Because the image is so immediately recognizable, indeed so familiar, there is a tendency to think that we know all about this subject and think there is no need to explore it any further. The images have become iconic, and icons are not to be questioned or challenged. It was Warhol's self-appointed task to change that.

Sometimes, however, repetition can make us look more closely, especially the way Warhol uses it, for example, *Lavender Disaster*

(1964), is a grid of 15 black silk-screened images of the electric chair, printed on a lavender background. (Other versions of course used many different background colours and different numbers of images.) On one level one could interpret the repetition of the image as suggesting that death is common, and that death too can be mass produced, just like a photograph. But then we see that these multiple images of the chair aren't exactly identical after all. The hand of the silk-screener is evident. Some images are darker than others, they have more ink, they are denser, blacker, more sinister. There are small but important differences between them. It wouldn't be over-interpreting to take from these images the realization that, even though death is ubiquitous and commonplace, no two deaths are ever identical.

And yes, there is a sort of grotesque beauty in Warhol's electric chairs, one he obviously recognized. He said;

"You wouldn't believe how many people will hang a picture of an electric chair in their room — especially if the color of the picture matches the curtains."

However much Warhol enjoys playing with and subverting aesthetic notions about the produced image and the nature of mass production, his use of repetition also raises a more humane issue. Warhol's professed reason for painting multiple soup cans was that he had eaten Campbell's soup for lunch every day for 20 years. And this is surely how most of us live our lives. However much we crave variety or novelty, however special we consider ourselves to be, our lives are essentially made up of repeated acts — eating, sleeping, working, having sex. Warhol's art embraces these multiple repetitions. He celebrates and redeems them.

Summary

All Warhol's work involves repetition and multiple images.

He chose silk-screening as the cheapest, simplest way of producing multiple, yet slightly varied images.

His work finds fascination and variety within repetition.

8 Warhol and Sex

The received wisdom is that Pop Art's predecessor — Abstract Expressionism — was a virile, macho, heterosexual (if not heterosexist) art form. This is allegedly demonstrated by its grandeur, energy, aggression and high seriousness. In reacting against Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art is therefore supposed to be playful, ironic, vernacular, dandyish and camp, even if not necessarily gay.

A biographical analysis would certainly tell us that the big names of Abstract Expressionism — Rothko, Pollock, De Kooning — were certainly heterosexuals. The stars of Pop were largely, though by no means exclusively, gay. Indeed Warhol was not initially welcomed into the fold by other gay Pop Artists because he was perceived as being too gay by half, though this was evidently an objection to his personal style rather than to his art.

However, the idea that aggression, virility or energy are uniquely heterosexual, or that playfulness and irony are uniquely homosexual, is a proposition that is destroyed by even the slightest acquaintance with either heterosexuals or homosexuals. Would a heterosexual paint a dollar sign any differently from the way a homosexual would? Would a homosexual drip paint onto a canvas differently from the way a heterosexual would? The questions are absurd, but one answer might be that no two people would ever paint a dollar sign or drip paint in exactly the same way, even if they shared the same sexual orientation.

When it comes to subject matter that addresses sexuality, however, the issues are different. While Warhol was finding his style in the late 1950s, his art included a lot of drawings of the male nude. They might be thought of as erotic, and in their day were regarded as mildly shocking, even if they were simultaneously dismissed for their campiness. By any standard they appear transparently 'homosexual'. Today they also look incredibly old fashioned in a way that Warhol's work from just a few years later never does. These drawings look '1950s' and demonstrate the extent to which Warhol discovered himself in the 1960s.

The works that first made his name — the soup cans, Brillo boxes, dollar bills, Green Stamps and so forth — appear extremely cool and neutral. To speak of them in sexual terms seems to be missing the point. The Coke bottle admittedly doesn't quite fit this description. It does have a calculated sexual element: it is a phallic symbol, but one with an hourglass figure. In that sense, however, its appeal would therefore appear to be polysexual. Critics used to speak a lot about Warhol's 'polymorphous perversity' — a term taken from Freud,

referring to a state of human development when the child responds to all manner of stimuli, before his or her sexual identity has been fixed.

These days this analysis of Warhol is rather sneered at. The straight world, it is argued, wanted to embrace Warhol's work but didn't want to face up to the fact that he was gay so they reinvented him as 'polymorphous'. There is some truth in this; on the other hand Warhol was also responsible for introducing gay culture to a mass audience that might previously have been alarmed or repelled by it.

He wasn't alone in this. Warhol was not single-handedly responsible for introducing hustlers, transvestites and sado-masochism to the mainstream: one might cite David Bowie, Lou Reed or John Schlesinger (director of *Midnight Cowboy*) as equally important. But Warhol prefigures all these people, and they all tip their hat to him. Reed was a member of Warhol's house band. Bowie sang a song called *Andy Warhol* and went on to play him in the movie *Basquiat*. Various Warhol superstars appeared in *Midnight Cowboy* to give it 'authenticity'.

This is not the time or place for an in-depth discussion of the 1960s 'sexual revolution'. Suffice it to say that this was an era in which there was much talk of liberation, both for men and women, and much talk — at least among hippies and would-be hippies — about free love. A refusal to condemn or be shocked by homosexuality was an inevitable part of this package. However, it is extremely hard to make a mental connection between Warhol and 'free love'. Today he seems the least 'hippie' of artists.

We are told that Warhol's own sex life was anything but a sexual carnival. He appears never to have had a satisfactory, lasting sexual relationship, and in a 1980 interview with Scott Cohen he admitted, or possibly boasted, that he was still a virgin. Sexual guilt and a Catholic upbringing must surely have played their part, and after the shooting there were probably physical difficulties. Together these things guaranteed that Warhol's enthusiasm would be for observation rather than participation.

At a time when a great deal of popular art and entertainment was a celebration of unfettered sexuality, Warhol began to suggest that sex was, at best, over-rated, at worst a refined form of torture. Ever the true subversive, he wished to be liberated from the imperatives of liberation.

In *From A to B and back Again* he tells us;

"Sex is nostalgia for when you used to want it sometimes. Sex is nostalgia for sex." (p.53).

And later;

"After being alive, the next hardest thing is having sex. I found that it's too much work." (p.93).

In *Exposures* he also tells us;

"Truman (Capote) says he can get anyone he wants. I don't want anyone I can get." (p.45).

In *From A to B* he describes how he began an 'affair with my television' that enabled him to stop caring about close relationships with other people, but he claims it was the tape recorder, which he called his wife;

"…that really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, and I was glad to see it go."

In a passage that contains at least as much pathos as it does humour he says;

"Nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape, and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem any more." (p.32).

Perhaps he is saying that emotional pain is tolerable so long as you can turn it into art. Or perhaps he is turning the pain into a good self-deprecating joke. Either way the pain seems perfectly real.

But for all this detachment and rejection, there is no sense that Warhol wasn't involved in sex, fascinated by it, and that it figured greatly in his art. Equally it is not easy to feel that he would have been altogether 'better off' if by some means or other he could have been sexually 'liberated'.

The Warholian universe was highly charged with sexuality, whether the Factory or Studio 54 or the sets of his movies. Perhaps at a personal level Warhol enjoyed surrounding himself with people whose sexuality was less problematic, or at least more visible, than his own. The voyeur and the exhibitionist were thus able to have a profound, symbiotic relationship.

The world Warhol moved in undoubtedly contained a high proportion of homosexuals. Yet his art does not feel gay in the way that, say, Cocteau's or even David Hockney's does. Warhol's world feels sexually inclusive rather than exclusive.

A movie such as *Couch* (1964) (its title puns on the idea both of the casting couch and the psychiatrist's couch) shows all manner of gay and straight sexual activity, some of it very explicit, some of it rather listless and abstract. It is as close to a straightforward pornographic movie as Warhol ever made, but it assumes the existence of a wildly polymorphous audience, one that probably doesn't exist. Whatever your sexual proclivities *Couch* is guaranteed to contain something that will *not* turn you on.

Warhol says in *POPism*;

"And there were a lot of straight people around at the Factory, too, anyway. The gay thing was what was flamboyant, so it got attention, but there were a lot of guys hanging around because of all

the beautiful girls.

Of course, people said the Factory was degenerate because 'anything went' there, but I think that was a very good thing. As one straight kid said to me; 'It's nice not to be trapped into something, even if that's what you are'."

Certainly the women in Warhol's entourage and movies always appeared very charismatic, sexually confident and powerful, at least the way Warhol presented them; women such as Nico, International Velvet, Jane Forth, Edie Segwick and Andrea Feldman. The ones who survived and went on to have careers outside Warhol's orbit — Viva, Mary Woronow, Sylvia Miles — never achieved the status and success they had had within it.

Warhol's fascination with women connected to a fascination with drag and drag performers. He made portraits of them, most conspicuously in a 1975 series called *Ladies and Gentleman*, and they frequently featured in his movies. An interest in drag is hardly unexpected in someone who is obsessively concerned with sexuality and glamour. It solves certain problems. It suggests that these things can be put on and taken off, like a wig or a dress.

There is a certain kind of crude drag act that can appear to be a misogynistic mockery of femininity, but that never seems to have been Warhol's angle. He said that he liked Candy Darling so much because 'on a good day' you couldn't believe she wasn't a man. The clear implication is that some days were better than others. But Candy Darling did look the part. She wanted to look like a woman, not like a man *dressed* as a woman.

Others in the Warhol crowd, such as Jackie Curtis and Holly Woodlawn, achieved less successful transformations, and when Warhol himself attempted drag, the effect was not only unconvincing but positively alarming. In photographs by Christopher Markos, or in a variety of Polaroid self-portraits, the effect is both comical and grotesque. The make-up doesn't hide the gaunt, rough Warhol face. If anything it makes him look more masculine.

In *The Film Director as Superstar* (1974) Joseph Gelmis interviews Warhol and says to him;

"It's been suggested that your stars are all compulsive exhibitionists and that your films are therapy. What do you think?"

Warhol's reply is priceless. He ignores the question and simply says;

"Have you seen any *beavers?* They're where girls take their clothes off completely. And they're always alone on a bed. Every girl is always on a bed. And then they sort of fuck the camera."

Gelmis, who seems not to realize that he is being toyed with, writes;

“The only time that Warhol became at all animated was when he started to discuss the ‘beavers’ he had seen earlier in the day.” (p. 112).

We are all a lot more familiar with pornographic images today than we were when Warhol began his work, and Warhol himself is partly responsible for that familiarity. Prior to the 1960s the idea that an artist would be concerned with, or even admit to an interest in, pornography was shocking. Warhol’s occasional use of pornographic images, in his films and paintings, owed a lot to his own personal interests, and yet the art he made from them is of a piece with his other work.

An interest in glamour and an interest in pornography might seem at first to be contradictory, yet both involve the display and consumption of sexuality. Whereas glamour creates a smooth, glossy carapace of sexuality, pornography seeks to reveal its gross, sweaty, biological nature. Certainly the sexual images of *Couch* or even *Kiss*, seem very grubby indeed.

Warhol liked a certain amount of grime or dirt in his work, the grain of a newspaper photograph, the smear of the silk-screen squeegee, the roughness of 16mm film. Certainly in those days most pornography had a similarly rough-edged look to it, that it has certainly lost over the decades.

In 1977 Warhol began making some explicitly sexual works, based on nude Polaroids he had taken of men having sex. The less explicit ones are now known as the *Torso* series, the more explicit ones as *Sex Parts*, and some of these are very explicit indeed. The men are faceless, they are reduced to their body parts. Yet the works display an eye for composition that creates a sort of abstract beauty while not reducing their impact as sexual images.

Although Warhol’s death in 1987 meant that he did not see the very worst effects and terrors of AIDS, his diaries contain many references to the disease, and he certainly lived long enough to lose several close friends. In the early 1980s Warhol’s celibacy suddenly looked less like an ironic pose, and more like good sense. Images of extreme gay sex from the 1970s inevitably now serve as *memento mori*. Warhol’s skull paintings, even though they were done well before anyone knew about AIDS, appear now to be the grim other side of his depiction of body parts.

Warhol’s most enigmatic utterance on sexual matters is recorded in a book by Victor Bockris called *William Burroughs; A Report from the Bunker*. Bockris, Burroughs and Warhol are in conversation:

BOCKRIS:
Andy, you had the best sex in England?

WARHOL:

No, the best sex was when this guy bit off this guy's nose. That was the best sex.

BURROUGHS:

I heard about that.

WARHOL:

Wasn't that the best sex, Bill?

BURROUGHS:

Ah yes, I imagine so.

WARHOL:

The best.

Summary

Warhol's initial success coincided with a period of 'sexual liberation' yet his work and life subvert any easy ideas of liberation.

Warhol was gay, yet he isn't simply a 'gay artist'.

His work shows a simultaneous fascination with glamorous and pornographic imagery.

9 The Present and Future Warhol

In the years since Andy Warhol's death his reputation and the financial value of his art has increased exponentially. In 2001 the Warhol Museum organized 39 shows and loans of his work. A recent touring exhibition of his work visited Eastern Europe, making Warhol the first modern American artist to have his work shown in Latvia and Kazakhstan.

The Warhol Foundation has struck various licensing deals which mean that Warhol images now appear on everything from scarves to plates to stationery to martini glasses to hot-water bottles. The US post office is planning to issue a stamp with one of his photobooth self-portraits on it.

When Warhol's works come up at auction they regularly set record prices. In 1998 *Orange Marilyn* sold for $17.3 million, while $2.3 million dollars is the current going rate for a small electric chair silk-screen.

Of course, none of this in itself says much about whether or not Warhol is a great artist, but what it certainly does mean is that his work continues to connect with a mass audience as well as with the connoisseurs and taste-makers of the art world. He continues to be seen as current and relevant.

The discovery that Warhol had been a practising Catholic at the end of his life, combined with the many works of art he made from Leonardo's *Last Supper* has led to some debate about the extent to which he was a 'spiritual' artist. The question is a difficult one. If we understand the word spiritual simply to mean a concern with things beyond the merely physical and material, then 'spiritual art' would once have seemed a tautology. If a painting wasn't in some sense spiritual, then it probably wasn't art; it was just paint.

But then we remember Warhol's recommendation that if we want to know all about Andy Warhol and his art we should just look at the surface of his work, that there is nothing behind it. There are plenty of modern artists who would share this emphasis on the material nature of art, and yet this doesn't quite describe the experience of looking at an Andy Warhol painting. One doesn't think, 'Here's a canvas that looks like a soup can, but actually it's just paint', any more than one does when looking at Leonardo's *Last Supper*. Rather one is inclined to think, 'Here's an image of a soup can, or a dollar bill, or Marilyn Monroe, that clearly has a material existence but which also allows me to perceive the subject in a way I never quite have before.'

In that sense Warhol's best work is not merely spiritual, it is actually transcendent. It not only allows us to see eternity in a grain of

sand, but to see it in a Coke bottle or a can of soup. In Warhol's work, as William Burroughs put it;

"…a soup can, seen with a clear eye, can be as portentous as a comet." (*Warhol*, 1989).

Andy Warhol has cleared all our eyes.

Glossary

Abstract Expressionism Post-war, mostly New York-based artistic movement, that produced large, non-figurative, gestural, spiritually complex paintings. Artists include Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning.

Agitprop Literally a political strategy involving techniques of agitation and propaganda to influence public opinion. Originally used by the Marxist theorist Plekhano and then by Lenin.

Brechtian alienation German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) employed what he called the *Verfretndungseffekt*, usually translated as 'alienation effect' but more correcdy it means something that is 'made strange', i.e. a way of presenting things on stage in a non-naturalistic way to enable us to see them with fresh eyes.

Conceptual art Art that is more concerned with ideas than with representation. Its appeal is therefore intellectual rather than visual. Artists include Joseph Beuys, Christo, Yoko Ono.

Cubism A short-lived artistic movement that reduced physical forms to cubes, spheres and cylinders. It also contended that objects were best depicted by simultaneously showing them from multiple viewpoints. Artists include Picasso and Braque.

Dadaism A largely nihilistic artistic movement which believed in the subversion of traditional art and culture. Artists include Tristan Tzara and Marcel Duchamp.

Diptych A painting made on two joined but detachable panels.

Exploding Plastic Inevitable A multi-media event and environment involving rock bands, dance, and the projection of slides and film.

Factory Warhol's studio and workshop.

Faux naif Someone or something that has the appearance of naivety but in reality is very knowing and sophisticated.

Green Stamps Stamps that were given out with purchases in shops and supermarkets in the 1960s as a kind of bonus system. Stamps were stuck into books and redeemed against consumer items.

High Bohemia Term used to describe Warhol's working and social environment, which included movie stars, fashion designers, various heiresses and members of the European aristocracy.

ICA The Institute of Contemporary Arts, a London gallery that has championed cutting edge, avant-garde art, since the middle of the twentieth century.

Idiot savant Term used to describe individuals who display little obvious intelligence but are able to perform formidable mental or artistic tasks.

Impressionism The late nineteenth-century movement that marks the beginning of modern art, employing exuberant colour and vigorous brush strokes, often giving a sketchy 'unfinished' appearance. Generally concentrated on contemporary and vernacular subject matter. Artists include Monet, Manet, Cezanne, Degas.

Minimalism A movement that strips art down to its elemental forms, relieving it of subjective or personal expression. Artists include Donald Judd and Carl Andre.

Pop Art A twentieth-century art movement that takes its images from consumerism, the mass media and popular culture, and simultaneously subverts and celebrates them.

Surrealism A post-Freudian artistic and literary movement involving the unrestrained exploration and expression of the unconscious and subconscious mind. Artists include Dali, Ernst, Magritte.

Underground film movement Term used to describe a loose association of 1960s American experimental filmmakers. The films were anti-Hollywood and anti-mainstream, and took much of their inspiration from the 1960s obsession with sex, drugs and rock and roll.

Chronology

1928 Born Andy Warhola, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1936 Has an emotional breakdown attack which forces him to stay in bed for a month.

1945 Attends the Carnegie Institute of Technology, majoring in pictorial design.

1949 Graduates from Carnegie, and moves to New York to work as a commercial artist. Changes his name to Warhol.

1950 His mother, Julia Warhola, moves to New York to live with her son.

1952 His first solo art exhibition at New York's Hugo Gallery, entitled *Andy Warhol: Fifteen Drawings Based on the Writings of Truman Capote*.

1953-5 Self-publishes a series of promotional books, with titles like *Love is A Pink Cake* and *A la Recherche du Shoe Perdu*.

1956 His work appears in a show called *Recent Drawings*, at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

1957 He forms Andy Warhol Enterprises. Has plastic surgery on his nose, but is unhappy with the results.

1960 Paints his first Pop paintings, using images of Superman, Batman, Popeye and Coca-Cola bottles.

1962 Begins painting soup cans, as well as the Death and Disaster, Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe series. The soup cans are displayed at the Ferns Gallery in Los Angeles and are a major success. He starts using silk-screening.

1963 Paints Electric Chairs, Race Riots, then after the John F. Kennedy assassination, portraits of Jackie Kennedy. Buys a 16mm movie camera and begins to make movies.

1964 Paints the Most Wanted Men series, creates the Brillo boxes. Buys his first tape recorder and begins recording his own conversations. Solo exhibitions in New York and Paris.

1965 Continues to make a great many films. Designs a cover for *Time* magazine. Solo exhibitions in Paris, Buenos Aires, Turin and Toronto.

1966 At an exhibition in the Castelli Gallery he covers the walls with his cow wallpaper. Creates multimedia events, under the title the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, involving live music, dance and film projection.

1967 *Chelsea Girls*, Warhol's major film work, opens and is an international commercial and critical success. Warhol is signed up for a lecture tour and sends a Iookalike — Allen Midgette — to impersonate him.

1968 Shot by Valerie Solanas of SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men). Paul Morrissey takes over responsibility for film production under the Warhol name.

1969 First issue of *Interview* published.

1971 Warhol's stage play *Pork* is performed in London and New York. Has a major exhibition at London's Tate Gallery.

1972 Begins to make a large number of portraits. His mother dies.

1974 2000 Mao portraits shown in Paris.

1975 Publication of the book, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again*).

1976 Begins the series of Skull paintings.

1977 Paints Athletes, Torsos, Hammer and Sickles. Shows his vast collection of folk art at the Museum of Folk Art in New York.

1978 Paints the Shadows series and makes the Oxidation paintings.

1979 Publication of *Andy Warhol's Exposures*. An exhibition called *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the 70s*, shown at the Whitney Museum, New York The exhibition is not well-received.

1980 Makes paintings using diamond dust, and creates the series Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century.

1981 Paints the series Knives, Guns, Crosses and Myths.

1982 *Andy Warhol's TV* appears on a New York cable channel.

1983 Creates a poster for the centennial of the Brooklyn Bridge.

1984 Creates the Rennaissance, Munch and Rorschach paintings. Collaborates with Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francesco Clemente.

1985 Publication of the book *America*.

1986 Paints the series Camouflage, Cars and Flowers. A series of paintings based on the Last Supper shown in Milan. *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes* appears on MTV.

1987 In January his first exhibition as a photographer opens at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York. Dies on February 22nd after gall bladder surgery. He is buried in Pittsburgh. On April 1st a memorial service at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral is attended by over 2000 people.

The Films of Andy Warhol

Given the haphazard circumstances in which these films were made, and the even more haphazard way they were stored and archived, one or two of these dates are probably debatable.

1963 *Andy Warhol films Jack Smith Filming 'Normal Love '*
1963 *Blow job*
1963 *Eat*
1963 *Haircut*
1963 *Kiss*
1963 *Sleep*
1963 *Tarzan and Jane Regained…Sort Of*
1964 *Couch*
1964 *Empire*
1964 *Mario Banana*
1964 *Taylor Mead's Ass*
1964 *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women*
1965 *Beauty #1*
1965 *Beauty #2*
1965 *Bitch*
1965 *Camp*
1965 *Fifty Fantastics and Fifty Personalities*
1965 *Horse*
1965 *Kitchen*
1965 *The Life ofjuanita Castro*
1965 *More Milk Yvette — aka — Lana Turner*
1965 *My Hustler*
1965 *Poor Little Rich Girl*
1965 *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys*
1965 *Vinyl*
1966 *The Chelsea Girls*
1966 *The Velvet Underground and Nico*
1967 *Bike Boy* 1967
1967 *I, A Man*
1967 *Lonesome Cowboys*
1967 *The Loves of Ondine*
1967 *Nude Restaurant*
1968 *Blue Movie — aka — Fuck*
1968 *Flesh*
1970 *Imitation of Christ*
1970 *Trash*
1972 *Heat*
1974 *Andy Warhol's Dracula — aka — Blood for Dracula*

1974 *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein — aka — Flesh for Frankenstein*
1976 *Andy Warhol's Bad*

Further Reading

Books by Andy Warhol:

A: A Novel, New York: Grove, 1968

America, New York: Harper and Row, 1985

Andy Warhol Cars, New York/Stuttgart: Guggenheim/Hatje, 1988

Andy Warhol Nudes, Woodstock: Overlook, 1995

The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again), New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1975

The Andy Warhol Diaries, New York: Warner Books, 1989

Andy Warhol's Exposures, New York: Andy Warhol Books/Grosset and Dunlap, 1979

POPism: the Warhol '60s, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980

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Andy Warhol on the Web

www.warhol.org The website of the Andy Warhol Museum, and therefore by far the most accessible and best designed. It contains details of the museum's collection as well as of forthcoming events and educational programmes. The information about the Warhol archive — 8000 cubic feet of material — is particularly fascinating.

osws.artmuseum.net The One Stop Warhol Shop, a sort of exhibition in cyberspace, developed by the Warhol Museum and designed to be 'the single most comprehensive Internet Source on Andy Warhol.' An excellent site, but you will need a very powerful Internet connection or an amazing amount of patience to get the best out of it.

www.angelfire.com/ny2/ediesedgwick The Edie Sedgwick and Andy Warhol page, with an emphasis on the former, but it contains several galleries of photographs, many of which show Sedgwick and Warhol together. The site also contains a short voice clip of Sedgwick.

www.billyname.com A wonderfully eccentric site devoted to Billy Name, Warhol's house photographer, and the man who first painted the Factory silver. It contains interviews with Name and a large gallery of his excellent photographs.

members.aol.com/jeremymp/warhol.html Andy Warhol, a Celebration of Genius. A fan site, and some of it pretty amateurish, featuring artworks, poems and appreciation's by (one assumes rather young) fans of Andy Warhol. But it provides proof, if proof were needed, of the extent to which Warhol's work still connects with a youthful audience.

www.warhols.com A commercial site selling Warhol art, but still of interest to those not buying, since it tends to show the less well known and less reproduced works.

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